United Nations A/61/PV.17

General Assembly
Sixty-first session

Official Records

17th plenary meeting
Friday, 22 September 2006, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Manasseh Sogavare, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands.

Mr. Manasseh Sogavare, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Manasseh Sogavare, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Sogavare (Solomon Islands): I bring warm greetings from the Government and the people of Solomon Islands. Allow me to begin by conveying my most heartfelt and sincere congratulations to you, Madam, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Solomon Islands is confident that, as a result of your leadership, guidance and service to the world, our work to achieve global peace, progress and prosperity will bear fruit. My delegation assures you of our cooperation and support during your term in office.

Solomon Islands would also like to take this opportunity to applaud and pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, Foreign Minister of Sweden, who, with truly admirable skill, led us in achieving many reform initiatives following last year's World Summit, in particular the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, the launch of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the adoption of the development resolution, management reform, Secretariat mandate review and the Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

It would be remiss of me not to thank our Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his distinguished service to this premier institution. He has been a constant catalyst for change and has distinguished himself by combining leadership with vision, initiative, patience, respect, persistence and faith in this institution. Solomon Islands continues to render him and the Secretariat staff our support. We wish the Secretary-General well in his future endeavours and sincerely thank him for his service.

Solomon Islands would also like to join others in warmly welcoming the newest Member, the Republic of Montenegro, which was admitted into the United Nations family in June this year. We wish the new nation every success and look forward to working with it for the common good of the globe.

Democracy remains the bedrock of the Solomon Islands political system. My Government came to power four months ago, following the country's seventh national election since its attainment of political independence 28 years earlier. We were fortunate in having the Electoral Assistance Division of

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

06-53323 (E)

the United Nations Department of Political Affairs monitor and coordinate the international observers who oversaw this election. Despite the positive verdict of the international observers, a minor hiccup occurred during the second part of the election and led to three days of rioting. Solomon Islands looks at that incident as a wake-up call, urging that more be done for the development of its growing population. I am pleased to say that the incident is now behind us, stability has been restored and a Commission of Inquiry has been set up to look into the matter.

Solomon Islands would like to thank all those that participated in the election observer programme including the Commonwealth, the Pacific Islands Forum, Australia, New Zealand and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). My Government has gone ahead and put in place some integrity legislation that will strengthen the development of the party system in Solomon Islands and bring about needed political stability.

Like many young democracies, Solomon Islands is being challenged and tested. Governance is expensive and needs support in order to be nurtured and to flourish. Political ideology should belong to all, not only to those that can afford it.

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, led by Australia and supported by New Zealand and all the Pacific Islands Forum countries, has just completed its third year. My Government has renewed the Regional Assistance Mission's term for another twelve months, given the Mission's success in transforming the country from a fragile to a stable State. Solomon Islands is undertaking a comprehensive review of the Mission in an effort to strengthen the existing partnership, with the objective of broadening the scope and role of the Mission so that it can take a more development-oriented approach.

The theme of this session, "Implementing a Global Partnership for Development", demands a renewed commitment to existing partnerships between developed and developing countries and presents an opportunity to reorder and close the North-South divide through a strengthened multilateral system.

Just last week, more than one quarter of the most vulnerable Members of the United Nations, the least developed countries, met here in this Assembly to review the Brussels Programme of Action. These countries have special needs and require special attention. While we welcome the declaration issued by the High-level Meeting on the midterm comprehensive global review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action, it is not the declaration that implements the Brussels Programme of Action, rather it is our action in honouring our international obligations and commitments.

Solomon Islands is a country of small communities, scattered across nine hundred islands. Sustainable development for Solomon Islands can be achieved only through a global partnership in which development is directed at rural communities. The approach must have a sense of urgency and the common purpose of enabling the rural population to exploit their resources thanks to the transfer of appropriate technologies and thus to realize their economic aspirations.

The shape and future of international relations depends on how we manage change. According to Charles Darwin, it is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but rather the one most responsive to change.

I am pleased to note that this year the United Nations is looking at expanding its presence in the Pacific region. Such an approach strengthens United Nations relations with its Members. In that regard, Solomon Islands looks forward to the proposed upgrading of the UNDP sub-office in Honiara to the country level.

Solomon Islands notes that the first part of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document features rural and agricultural development. My delegation is heartened by a proposed joint UNDP/United Nations Capital Development Fund project for the strengthening of the Solomon Islands provincial government system and for investing in provincial infrastructure and communications. The project has the merit of strengthening all democratic principles and bringing the State closer to its people. My Government stands ready to assist such a worthwhile project in any way it can. Solomon Islands calls on all partners to contribute to it and to better the lives of a people whose needs have been neglected for so long.

Solomon Islands follows developments in the Middle East with concern, in particular in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. It is sad to see parents burying sons in a conflict that claims the lives of more children than soldiers. Solomon Islands associates itself with

the observation of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, that something is truly wrong. Under such difficult circumstances, we must find the strength to trust one another and work tirelessly to find a permanent, sustainable and lasting solution to the crisis. The world looks to this Organization for a solution, and we must not fail it. That can only be done if we are prepared to take a holistic approach in seeking a permanent solution to the Middle East question, by embracing all parties in the region and working in the spirit of the United Nations Charter and through dialogue and consultation.

On Security Council reform, in the words of our Secretary-General, "no reform of the United Nations will be complete without the reform of the Security Council" (*A/61/1, para. 161*). The time is ripe to balance ongoing reforms with Security Council reform. The Council's failure to act — for various political reasons — to contain certain conflicts calls into question its effectiveness, given its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The most vulnerable Members of the Organization do not have the luxury of waiting, because conflicts and potential conflicts may take root. More than 5 billion dollars has already been spent on United Nations peacekeeping missions — money that would be better spent on development.

Only by enlarging the Council and arming it with improved working methods can we make it truly representative and accountable to the wider membership of this Organization. Solomon Islands would like to see countries such as Japan and Germany as permanent members, together with emerging Powers such as India and Brazil.

On the question of the representation of Taiwan, the continuous refusal by this Organization over the past 13 years to discuss the representation of the 23 million people of Taiwan at the United Nations is a matter of serious concern. This creates an institutional gap in an Organization where we are all supposed to stand equal. My delegation wishes to register its disappointment at the fact that its right even to discuss the issue was denied last week. Solomon Islands feels that the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter continue to be violated in this respect. The time has come for this institution to act according to the rules that guide the behaviour and conduct of Members and to have an honest debate on the issue. Solomon Islands renews its call on the United Nations to recognize the right of the 23 million people of Taiwan to be represented at the United Nations. Solomon Islands is also concerned about security threats on the Taiwan Strait. My delegation calls on all Member States to distinguish our collective interests to preserve peace from narrow interests that threaten peace. Solomon Islands further calls on the United Nations, the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, to mediate and engage with the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and other stakeholders in finding a permanent solution to this issue.

This year we will be electing a new Secretary-General. Solomon Islands, a member of the Asian Group, would like to see a Secretary-General who has an interest in our subregion. For the last 28 years, since Solomon Islands joined this noble institution, no Secretary-General has ever visited my part of the world. We would like to see our future Secretary-General engage more closely with Member States on the other side of the globe.

On the subject of terrorism, Solomon Islands once again reiterates its condemnation of all forms of terrorism, in whatever form and manifestation, wherever and whenever it may occur. Recent attacks in India and in various parts of the world underscore the fact that terrorism remains a threat to all. Solomon Islands looks forward to an early conclusion of the comprehensive terrorism convention and is pleased that talks between the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee and Member States, including those in the Pacific region, have begun. It is our hope that the consultations will address the gaps in national mechanisms and, where possible, have a regional approach to the issues. I am pleased to report that, with the assistance of New Zealand, Solomon Islands expects to fulfil some of its counter- terrorism reporting obligations during the course of 2007.

Mr. Chidyausiku (Zimbabwe), Vice-President, took the Chair.

At last year's World Summit, 170 of our Heads of State and Government agreed to ensure the fuller participation of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, in the global system. The lack of agreement at the Doha Round continues to hurt small island open-market economies, such as that of Solomon Islands. We hope that enough political will can be garnered to confront existing differences and

ensure that a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system is established.

Solomon Islands continues to benefit from North-South cooperation to sustain its growth. We must also continue to work on enhancing South-South cooperation. I am pleased to note that developing countries, such as Papua New Guinea, have provided needed assistance in education and security. My Government is paying closer attention to renewable sources of energy with the help of India, Taiwan and Indonesia. It is our hope that, with the cooperation of all our partners, appropriate technologies will be transferred, so that communities can have access to modern and affordable energy. In this connection, the Global Environment Fund and the United Nations Environment Programme could look at facilitating such initiatives. Solomon Islands would like to thank India, Taiwan, Indonesia, China and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs for enabling experts from the Pacific Islands to meet and work on such programmes.

A number of developmental opportunities have emerged since the 2005 World Summit meeting. Among other things, a HIV/AIDS declaration has been adopted. Solomon Islands would like to see the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria provide a complete package for the Pacific region, ranging from awareness to treatment. It is cheaper to invest in a problem that is small than to treat a full-blown pandemic. Solomon Islands would like the Global Fund to reconsider the Pacific regional project submitted during the sixtieth session.

Solomon Islands notes with regret that the recent five-year review conference of the 2001 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects did not agree on a final document. Solomon Islands continues to believe that the root cause of the emerging gun culture is development-related. At some stage, such conferences should focus more on addressing poverty issues within vulnerable countries, where gun culture is likely to emerge, in a global effort to address the issue once and for all.

On the issue of international migration, which was taken up at last week's High-level Meeting, Solomon Islands, together with its regional neighbours, continues to seek opportunities to manage short-term labour migration within its subregion and globally. While nothing concrete has emerged, the regional discussion has allowed us to better understand the receiving States' position and, hopefully, will allow us to work towards striking an agreed balance. Solomon Islands feels that the pull factor from the South to the North is natural and serves as a win-win factor for the South that provides needed labour for the North's growing economies, while at the same time benefiting the South financially.

The United Nations offers opportunities for Member States to become responsible global citizens. Solomon Islands would like to see mission recruitment procedures at country level. We are also seriously looking at participating in selected United Nations civilian police missions.

Finally, a reformed and strengthened United Nations represents our best hope for a better future. Solomon Islands reiterates its commitment to work within the framework of international cooperation to address today's economic, social, cultural and humanitarian challenges.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands for the statement he has just made.

The Honourable Manasseh Sogavare, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Redley Killion, Vice-President of the Federated States of Micronesia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Federated States of Micronesia.

Mr. Redley Killion, Vice-President of the Federated States of Micronesia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Redley Killion, Vice-President of the Federated States of Micronesia, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Killion (Federated States of Micronesia): I am honoured and grateful to address the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, and in so doing I join other Members in congratulating you, Madam, on your historic assumption of the presidency of this body.

Let me assure you of my country's full support. We are confident that under your leadership, the Organization will be steered safely through the challenges ahead. I would also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his dedication and stewardship of the Organization during the past year.

Just recently, the Pacific island countries lost one of its leaders. The Federated States of Micronesia is deeply saddened by the passing of King Tupou IV of the Kingdom of Tonga. We express our profound condolences to the people and the leaders of Tonga during their period of national mourning and wish them well in their transition to a new leadership.

We are keenly aware of the remaining awesome task of implementing measures to reform the Organization. We are nonetheless encouraged by the significant achievements made so far since the adoption of the Outcome Document of the World Summit last year. The United Nations has made great strides, for instance in constituting the Human Rights Council, in launching the Peacebuilding Commission and in adopting the resolution on implementing international development goals.

Reform of the Security Council should remain a high-priority agenda item. My country would like to reiterate its position as expressed in previous years. We support a restructured Security Council that reflects the current realities of international society. For the Council to be effective and its work meaningful, its working methods should be improved and its membership, both permanent and non-permanent, expanded. We must give new impetus to the reform process and seek, with an open mind, new ways to achieve the institutional reform of the United Nations.

The small island developing States in the Pacific such as my country, recognized as among the most vulnerable, stand to benefit from an efficient and relevant United Nations. It is for that reason that we place high hopes on the relevant reforms. We hope that such reforms will facilitate our achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally recognized commitments, which, if left to our own devices, we cannot reach, even with the best of intentions and efforts.

Thus, we are pleased with and grateful for the decision to establish additional United Nations offices in our Pacific region, including in my country. Taken within the context of the overall reform of the Organization, the presence of those offices is mutually beneficial to the United Nations and to our peoples in many ways, including through effective coordination in the delivery of much-needed assistance and services.

My country, with a large exclusive economic zone, attaches great importance to the sustainable development and conservation of our marine resources and ecosystem. Consistent with that priority, we have joined forces with some of our neighbouring States in calling for an immediate moratorium and a total ban on deep bottom trawl fishing. The Organization must not close its eyes to activities that result in commercial gain for only a few at the expense of the integrity of the ecosystem that supports the livelihood of our people, especially those living in areas that are widely recognized as vulnerable. We appeal to the international community to mobilize support to put an end to bottom trawl fishing and other activities that are ecologically destructive and unfriendly to the marine ecosystem.

It is well established by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other highly respected scientific organizations that the Earth's climate is adversely changing due to our carbon economy and the emission of greenhouse gases. Within this decade alone, we have witnessed unprecedented destruction caused by extreme weather events. The increasing magnitude, intensity and frequency of typhoons, hurricanes and other natural disasters, including the unprecedented melting and disappearance of glaciers, are directly linked to human activities. This obviously calls for a more robust post-Kyoto regime.

As an island nation composed mostly of low-lying small islands with large coastal areas, the Federated States of Micronesia is vulnerable to the adverse impact of climate change. Exposed to the effects of extreme weather events, our livelihood and traditions as an island people — in fact, our whole civilization — are under greater threat than ever before.

The sad irony is that those of us who contribute little to the causes of climate change and sea-level rise are the first in line to suffer the consequences. In the face of that reality, Micronesia will continue to speak out for concerted global action to mitigate the adverse impact of climate change, taking into consideration the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

While adaptation measures require national actions, the "polluters pay" principle should apply. Therefore, those who pollute should underwrite the costs of adaptation, particularly for small island developing States.

Sustainable development remains a top priority for small island developing States such as Micronesia, but it cannot be achieved by us alone. Our development still requires official development assistance from bilateral and multilateral donor partners alike. But official development assistance on its own is not sufficient. Ongoing propositions for active foreign direct investment and effective development partnerships, among others, should be translated into concrete action, as they are critical components of sustainable development.

The small island developing States continue to pin their hopes on the Mauritius Strategy as a blueprint for their sustainable development. But what good is the Strategy if the support necessary to implement it is not forthcoming? The international community must provide that support, which would include facilitation and improvement of access to existing resources and, where appropriate, allocation of dedicated financial resources. For the Mauritius Strategy to be effective and meaningful, it must be mainstreamed into all United Nations processes, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process.

In addition to the Mauritius Strategy, we support the principles of the Information Society and the Community of Democracies as vital to our national progress. In particular, we seek help in the formulation of our national plan on information and communication technologies and in access to broadband connectivity, which we believe will help overcome the obstacles to our development that result from the geographical configuration of our island country.

Dependency on fossil fuel is an obstacle to our sustainable development. To mitigate that obstacle and prevent the perpetuation of this carbon economy, my Government has prioritized renewable energy as the way forward. I therefore reiterate the call made by many small island developing States, including my own, for accelerated efforts in the development, utilization and distribution of renewable energy technologies to small island developing States. We will continue to look to the international community, including our development partners, to help ensure that such technologies are transferred and put in place effectively.

Terrorism affects all countries, large and small, rich and poor. Micronesia condemns, in the strongest terms, terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The taking of innocent life is unambiguously unjustifiable, regardless of one's grievances.

We therefore call once again on the United Nations to do everything in its power to prevent terrorism and to mitigate its root causes. While we are doing our best to uphold our responsibilities and obligations under the United Nations counter-terrorism resolutions, we need the assistance of the international community to more effectively implement and carry on the fight against this scourge.

In that spirit, we would like to commend the efforts that resulted in the recent ceasefire in Lebanon. We hope that the ceasefire will lead to a lasting peace for the Israeli and Lebanese peoples. We also hope that, by building on that momentum, the conflict between Israel and Palestine will be resolved. The people of Israel have the right to live within secure, recognized borders, free from the fear of terrorism. The Palestinian people have the right to have their own State and to coexist peacefully with their neighbours.

Micronesia is concerned about the threats to regional stability and international peace and security posed by nuclear proliferation. We urge the international community to continue its efforts to address that problem.

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to our outgoing Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his distinguished leadership and his decades of dedicated service to the Organization. My country expresses to him our gratitude and best wishes.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Federated States of Micronesia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Redley Killion, Vice-President of the Federated States of Micronesia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Gül, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Mr. Gül (Turkey): I wish to begin by warmly congratulating the President of the General Assembly. Although the empowerment of women has long been a United Nations priority, it has been nearly 40 years since a woman last held the Assembly presidency. Thus, we are encouraged by her election. I wish her every success.

I also want to express my appreciation to the President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson. The World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1), which addresses the challenges of our time, was the joint product of our work and his tireless efforts. His sound guidance enabled us to move forward on the pressing issues related to reform. The Peacebuilding Commission, the Human Rights Council and the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy are the hallmarks of those efforts.

In addition, it is my distinct pleasure to pay a heartfelt tribute to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. His name will continue to inspire us whenever we think of his dedication to global peace and stability and his tireless reform efforts.

The hostilities and the outright destruction in Lebanon tested the faith placed in the United Nations. In the end, the resolve of Member States was manifested. From the very beginning, Turkey was engaged in active diplomacy and took its place at the forefront of the international efforts to end the bloodshed. At the same time, we remained in close contact with all the parties to the conflict. Throughout, we provided humanitarian aid to the people of Lebanon and assisted in the rapid evacuation of some 10,000 foreign nationals.

We supported the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). It is a major step forward. Yet, given the many challenges that remain, it is only a first step towards bringing peace and stability to the region. We have decided to contribute to the implementation of the resolution, which is aimed at restoring the political sovereignty of the Lebanese Government.

Indeed, we must try to seize the opportunity represented by resolution 1701 (2006). We hope that its spirit will be translated into a broader political perspective for the entire region. The tragic events in Lebanon should have reconfirmed that unilateralism is not the answer and that the use of force is not the solution. Similarly, they revealed for all to see that the question of Palestine continues to lie at the core of the problems in the Middle East.

This issue is not simply a conflict between two countries. It is a problem for which everyone pays a heavy price — a problem that has huge ripple effects on a global scale. Indeed, the continuation of this problem is used to justify extremism around the world. Therefore, progress made towards a lasting peace in the Middle East would have a positive impact on many other problems.

We note that everyone has drawn lessons from what took place in Lebanon. Now, in the aftermath of that tragedy, there is a different climate, conducive to a renewed peace initiative. Now is the time to revive efforts to put the Middle East peace process back on track. We make a heartfelt appeal to all the parties and to the international community not to let this opportunity pass by. What we need now is strong and determined leadership that will resolutely follow the path towards peace.

Let us not forget that the growing sense of injustice associated with the Middle East problem deepens the rift in terms of cultural perceptions. We cannot permit events in the region to undermine the prospects of the cross-cultural harmony that we are working so hard to achieve. We believe that better understanding among cultures is indispensable for global harmony. That is precisely why the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain co-sponsored the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, launched by the Secretary-General. The objective is to emphasize the elements that unite various societies around our common humanity.

The High-level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations will soon submit a comprehensive report to the Secretary-General setting out concrete and practical measures to improve intercultural dialogue. That is obviously what the world needs now. Therefore, we hope that the initiative will receive strong and sincere support from Member States.

Indeed, regardless of where we come from — whether it be the East or the West — whatever faith we profess and whatever tradition we represent, we must all act responsibly. In today's world, in which information travels at the speed of light, we must all refrain from acts and statements that can be misconstrued and can strengthen the hand of extremists. Likewise, our reactions must demonstrate

such a sense of responsibility. Thus, we call upon everyone to act with common sense and to keep humanity's best interests at heart.

As we focus on the Middle East, we must not lose sight of Iraq. It is equally urgent that we build a democratic and prosperous Iraq that is whole and free from ethnic and sectarian violence. I should like to recall that a staggering number of people have lost their lives as a result of violence. We must all help the Iraqis to achieve a national consensus and to resolve their differences through dialogue and democratic processes. First and foremost, the Iraqis themselves must work towards that end.

Throughout the past year, terrorism has continued to claim innocent lives. There is a growing realization that no degree of leniency can be extended to those who commit acts of terror. There is no room for double standards, and we can make no distinction between terrorists. At the same time, we must keep in mind that terrorism, an age-old method of coercion, has no deep links to any culture or religion. We should also be cautious not to associate any faith with terrorism.

By voting in favour of the proposed United Nations comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem in the April 2004 referendum, Turkish Cypriots responded positively to the expectations of the international community. Notwithstanding the intensive and sincere efforts of the Secretary-General, the Greek Cypriot side rejected that plan. Despite that rejection, the Turkish side remains committed to a just, peaceful and comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question, based on the well-established parameters determined through the good offices mission of the Secretary-General. Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus continue to support strongly the Secretary-General's mission. Indeed, the United Nations is the only sound platform that can help deliver lasting peace, cooperation and prosperity to all inhabitants of the island of Cyprus. The Turkish side still maintains the hope that the Greek Cypriot leaders will support the vision of a new partnership based on political equality with their Turkish Cypriot counterparts. The Turkish Cypriots have already given their support to the 8 July agreement and their consent to the United Nations suggestions for implementing that agreement in due course. There should be full-fledged negotiations on substantive issues between the two leaders of the island. Our proposal of 24 January 2006 for the simultaneous lifting of all restrictions related to the island remains on the table. In this day and age, living under unjustly imposed restrictions defies all reason. It is time for the Turkish Cypriots to integrate into the global economy. We appeal to the international community to heed the call of the Secretary-General to end the current isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, which has no legal or moral basis.

Turkey is close to the centre of most of the issues of concern to the international community, which naturally figure prominently on my country's foreign policy agenda. Our objective is to establish conditions for a lasting peace and enhance cooperation for integration in the greater region. In this context, our relations with our neighbours continue to diversify. We believe that our good-neighbourly relations with Greece will enhance cooperation, stability and prosperity in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean.

In a similar vein, we have prepared several regional initiatives. We take part in peacekeeping and police missions around the world. These greater objectives help explain our active diplomacy, primarily in regions such as the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus surrounding Turkey. In all such instances, we work to avert outright conflict and consolidate stability. We try to put out the fires of discord and cultivate reconciliation. We are committed to political processes and diplomatic solutions and are in the forefront of post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction and assistance.

The Balkans are passing through a profound transformation. In order not to relive the pain and suffering of the 1990s, we must vigilantly keep watch over peace. We must promote the building of viable State structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We must also promote a peaceful transition in Kosovo. We welcome Montenegro as a new Member of the United Nations.

Frozen conflicts in the Caucasus also demand our urgent attention. Resolution of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict on the basis of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity is of vital importance for peace and prosperity in the region. We would like to see this region become an area of prosperity based on cooperation.

We will continue to support the political process and reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. In addition to our strong presence in the International Security Assistance Force, Turkey is establishing a provincial

reconstruction team in the Vardak province of Afghanistan. Turkey will continue to be active in the areas of health, education and development in Afghanistan.

On the Kashmir question, we continue to encourage the parties involved to work for a just and lasting solution to the problem through dialogue.

We advocate reform at a time when transparency, the rule of law, gender equality, good governance and similar common values can no longer be denied to peoples, especially in an age of globalized communications.

Turkey's efforts are not, of course, confined to its immediate vicinity. Having consolidated our place among the largest economies of the world, we want to enrich and improve our relations with more distant regions. Our aim is to strengthen bilateral ties with Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific. We are actively engaged in efforts to resolve the problems of the African continent, having established local offices of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency in Addis Ababa and Khartoum to help coordinate this larger effort across the African continent. More branches will follow. Turkey has been recognized by the World Food Programme as a major donor of food to Africa. Turkey is also contributing to five United Nations and two European Union missions in Africa.

The fate of Africa is our common destiny, and we cannot remain indifferent to that continent's acute problems. We must not let down Africa. We appeal to the more fortunate to help that continent achieve its true potential.

After reviewing our activities within the United Nations, we have selected a number of areas as a priority in our work. These are issues related to development, peacekeeping operations, the strengthening of peacebuilding activities, humanitarian and relief operations, combating terrorism in all its forms and enhancing global energy security through the creation of safe transportation routes.

Turkey firmly believes in the need for international cooperation to achieve environmentally friendly and socially sustainable development. We must better cater to the needs of the developing countries, particularly in the field of poverty reduction, eliminating infectious diseases, reducing infant mortality and improving maternal health. If we fail to create equal opportunities for women and provide education for children, none of the above will ever be achieved.

I am pleased to say that Turkey is becoming a major donor country. Last year, Turkish official development assistance reached US$ 600 million. This figure does not reflect the contribution of the Turkish private sector, which contributes an almost equivalent amount. In this regard, we will further increase our contributions to the United Nations funds and programmes that serve the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

The President returned to the Chair.

Over the past two years, we have been campaigning for a seat on the Security Council for the term 2009-2010. Turkey has not served on the Council since 1961. This is an anomaly. We believe that, in the spirit of equitable rotation, our turn to be represented is long overdue. Turkey's membership will enrich the work of the Security Council in a singularly important manner. We will bring our unique attributes to bear on the work of the Council. Our membership will bring new insights and perspectives at a time when we see the United Nations becoming increasingly relevant in fulfilling the rightful hopes of humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jean Asselborn, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of Luxembourg.

Mr. Asselborn (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Two years ago, at this same rostrum, as the conclusion of my statement (see A/59/PV.10), I quoted these famous verses of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado:

> "Traveller, your footsteps
> Are the road, and nothing else.
> Traveller, there is no road.
> The road is made by walking;
> Walking makes the road."

What a road we have travelled since then. Indeed, the opening of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly is above all the opportunity for us to look back and assess the progress we have made, particularly since the September 2005 World Summit, but also to try to assess the work that still needs to be done to implement the noble ambitions we all agreed

upon one year ago in this Hall where we meet every year as a real parliament of nations. On that historic occasion, we forcefully reaffirmed that peace and security, development and human rights are the pillars of the United Nations system and constitute the essential element of a more just and a more peaceful world order.

One year later, what have we accomplished, and how can that progress be assessed in the light of these criteria: the reality of the situation, and the way in which the complex international situation and the never-ending future are evolving?

When we look at the current situation, we have to see that areas of shadow coexist with reasons for hope, and we have some cause for concern. More than ever, the Middle East is the centre of deep political, military, socio-economic and cultural tensions, with military confrontation on Lebanese lands and bombings in northern Israel, to mention only the most recent examples. A month of war has left behind it a terrible legacy of death and injury, destruction and contamination by mines and unexploded ordnance, as well as major economic consequences. My country immediately joined international solidarity efforts. The Stockholm conference enabled us to coordinate international support and to move towards reconstruction under the aegis of the United Nations and the Lebanese Government.

But beyond that immediate reaction, now that a cessation of hostilities has been brought about — late, it is true — we now have to consolidate the ceasefire and lay the foundations of a sustainable political process, the principal elements of which are defined in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). As reaffirmed a few days ago from this podium by the current President of the European Council, Ms. Tarja Halonen (see A/61/PV.10), the European Union is prepared to fully play its role in this context. Already, European contributions — to which my country is committed to participate — constitute what Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called the backbone of a strengthened United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

So the task of supporting the emergence of a fully sovereign and independent Lebanon which can exercise its sovereignty and a monopoly on armed force throughout its territory must be completed; all regional players must make their contribution to this process. By bringing about the lifting of the blockade of Lebanon, and by concretely addressing the issue of prisoners, the Secretary-General has laid the foundations for a lasting solution. We thank him for his effective work.

I was in Beirut, Tel Aviv and Ramallah a few days ago, and I realized once again the extent to which the absence of true peace in this region has had a negative effect on civilian populations, particularly in the occupied territories, where the humanitarian situation is getting worse day by day. I also realized the extent to which confrontation, violence and despair tend to spread and become entrenched. It is this grievous machine that we have to stop. More than ever before, it is clear that there can be no military solution or unilateral solution to the continuing conflicts in the region.

On 15 September, the ministers for foreign affairs of the European Union reaffirmed our full support for the search for a negotiated solution. We welcomed the announcement by President Abbas with regard to an agreement on the formation of a government of national unity, and we expressed the hope that such a government's programme would reflect the principles of the Quartet. Two days ago, as we know, the Quartet too endorsed that position.

However, persistent tension in the Middle East must not divert our attention from Africa. That continent continues to be scourged by poverty, disease and armed conflict. But at the same time there is hope, thanks to the continent's extraordinary vitality and creativity. Although far too many internal conflicts and international crises remain in many areas in Africa — for example, in Côte d'Ivoire; the Sudan, in particular the Darfur region, where a large-scale humanitarian crisis is looming; the Horn of Africa; and other areas as well — there are some signs of hope, sometimes fragile to be sure, are to be seen in countries as diverse as Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where an electoral process of unprecedented scale is under way with the massive support of the United Nations and the European Union, among other partners.

The African Union is also playing an increasingly positive role in crisis management on the African continent, as illustrated by its action in Darfur through the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). It is essential that this crucial action be speedily taken up by the deployment of an enlarged United Nations

mission, as provided for in Security Council resolution 1706 (2006).

With the creation and the operationalization a few months ago of the Peacebuilding Commission, another World Summit commitment has now been met. The United Nations now has an innovative instrument to manage post-conflict situations in order to ensure optimal transition from peacekeeping and urgent humanitarian assistance to restarting the development process. We wish every success to this new body, which certainly gives rise to great hope throughout the world.

Before leaving the issue of peace and security, I must briefly mention two subjects that have a major, horizontal impact: terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.

With regard to the scourge of terrorism, concerted and decisive action at the international and region levels must obviously be taken. I am pleased that at the end of its sixtieth session, under the energetic presidency of Mr. Jan Eliasson, whom I congratulate for his work, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288). The Strategy must both address the conditions that encourage the spread of terrorism and seek to prevent and act against terrorism, including through the various bodies of the United Nations, while at the same time guaranteeing respect for human rights and the rule of law. As European Union ministers for foreign affairs declared a few days ago, that latter consideration applies in particular to the treatment of all detainees, as well as to the problematic issue of secret detention centres.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems continues to give rise to grave concern at the international level. The attitude and the activities of North Korea in the area of nuclear proliferation recently led the Security Council unanimously to adopt its resolution 1695 (2006).

Another subject of concern is Iran. In its resolution 1696 (2006), the Security Council defined the main parameters which will guide the way in which the Iranian nuclear issue is approached by the international community and the European Union, which has been in discussion with Iran for more than two years. If those demands — particularly the suspension of all enrichment activity — are met, negotiations on a comprehensive agreement can begin and confidence can be restored.

The Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1) highlighted in particular the importance of development, which directly affects the fate of billions of human beings. While 2005 was the year of great development commitments, with the holding of the Group of Eight Summit at Gleneagles and the decision taken by the European Union — under the Luxembourg presidency — to meet the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income in official development assistance by 2015, 2006 has been the year of implementation, particularly with the adoption of resolution 60/265, which reflects the international consensus in that area.

For its part, Luxembourg continues to be proud of its participation — still too limited unfortunately — in the 0.7 per cent club, with 0.82 per cent of its gross national income devoted to official development assistance in 2005. We hope to reach 1 per cent within the next few years.

The meeting held earlier this week to consider the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries showed once again that the establishment of a true development partnership remains a priority and urgent task. Unfortunately, that also remains true for international action against HIV/AIDS, which was the subject of a high-level meeting in June.

Concerned about improving the quality and effectiveness of aid to the most impoverished, my country looks forward with great interest to the proposals of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence which will be made public in the next few months. The maxim "development is the other name for peace" remains amazingly current.

In September 2005, the participants in the Summit formally recognized that development, peace, security and human rights are linked and mutually reinforcing. To strengthen the international framework for the promotion and protection of human rights, the General Assembly decided in March 2006, as we know, to replace the old Commission on Human Rights with a Human Rights Council. While the new Council's first session enabled it to make some important progress in terms of standards, we must now bolster its establishment by providing it with all the means and instruments it needs — including special procedures —

to promote the cause of human rights and to react swiftly and effectively to specific situations of serious human rights violations.

Likewise, we welcome the recent conclusion of the negotiations on a draft international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. We hope that that important instrument can be adopted this fall by the General Assembly. Another significant innovation, adopted at last year's Summit — the notion of the "responsibility to protect" in case of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity — should be applied in accordance with the criteria and conditions defined in the Summit Outcome Document so that it can progressively become an undisputed standard to guide the action of the international community as the situation requires.

While peace and security, development and human rights are the three basic pillars on which the United Nations is based, those fundamental values can be fulfilled and fully expressed in real terms only through an effective and credible multilateral system. Multilateralism must not remain only a word. In the light of recent events in the Middle East, no nation, large or small, can escape the conclusion that multilateralism offers the only viable framework for finding solutions to the conflicts and threats that confront us.

It is our responsibility to provide the multilateral system with adequate means to carry out its principal missions. We must also ensure that the working methods and decision-making procedures of our bodies are defined and structured so that they can produce the best results and can best meet the legitimate expectations of Member States. Achieving a better cost-effectiveness ratio to benefit our peoples must be an objective of all Member States, large or small, of the North or the South. What is at stake is the credibility — perhaps even the survival — of multilateralism as a way to manage the major problems shared by humanity.

Some progress was made over the past year in reforming administrative and financial management, but much remains to be done. We must unite to bring about essential reform to transform the United Nations into an instrument fully capable of addressing the grave and multiple challenges at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In that context, we cannot overlook the organ to which the Charter of the United Nations entrusts a vital role in the maintenance and preservation of international peace and security: the Security Council. For many years, ways and means to strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of that essential body were the subject of in-depth discussions, without any significant progress being made. For our part, we are convinced that Security Council reform remains indispensable. It must be carried out both to strengthen the Council's representativity — by increasing the number of its permanent and non-permanent members, but without overburdening its functioning by granting the right of veto — and to improve its rules of procedure in order to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of its work and, thus, the legitimacy of its action.

I should like to conclude by referring to the person who has guided us and provided us with benchmarks as he has led the Organization for the past 10 years. I am, of course, speaking about our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. Although there is still some time before the end of his mandate — and I am sure that he intends to carry out a number of important missions before then — it is important that I now pay tribute to him and thank him for the work accomplished over the course of a lifetime devoted to serving the Organization.

The country that I have the honour to represent in this Hall, Luxembourg, also intends to be an important part of the life and the future of the Organization, which, more than 60 years after its establishment, continues to represent a noble ideal and hope for millions and millions of men and women. Luxembourg wants to put itself at the service of that ideal and of the international community and to shoulder its part of the responsibility in that regard. That is why, five years ago, we decided to submit our candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the biennium 2013-2014. Luxembourg, a founding Member of the United Nations that has not yet held a Council seat, views this candidacy as a new expression of its commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter, to peace and security, development and human rights and to an effective multilateral system.

Despite difficulties and obstacles, we must persevere, through dialogue and diplomacy, to fashion a United Nations worthy of our expectations. As we do so, let us be inspired by the reflection of the great

Michelangelo, who said, "The greatest danger is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it".

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain.

Shaikh Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to express my sincerest congratulations to you, Madam President, upon your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. It reflects the international community's trust in your diplomatic abilities, which will help ensure the success of this important session.

I want to take this opportunity to extend my deepest appreciation to all the countries that endorsed the nomination of Shaikha Haya Bint Rashed Al-Khalifa. The election of Shaikha Haya as President of the Assembly is an honour for the Kingdom of Bahrain, she being the third woman in the history of this Organization, as well as the first Arab and Muslim woman, to hold this prominent position. This election confirms the significant achievements and progress of women in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

I take this opportunity to commend her predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson of Sweden, for his tireless efforts during the Assembly's sixtieth session, one that will be remembered for efforts to reform the Organization.

I would also like to pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his devotion in promoting the United Nations and strengthening its leading role in upholding peace and security throughout the world, particularly in our Arab region during his recent trip to the Middle East.

In addition, I wish to congratulate the Republic of Montenegro upon its admission to the United Nations as the 192nd Member State. Allow me to express the hope that its joining this Organization will enhance peace and stability in the world.

The central force behind progress in developing countries and among their peoples lies in the inching of political reforms, economic liberalization and social modernization. This is the platform that the Kingdom of Bahrain has implemented in its reform process, led for several years by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, to strengthen democracy, human rights and economic growth. National gains have multiplied and popular participation in the political, economic and social fields has increased. This is reflected in many areas.

Democratic practices have been enhanced through municipal and parliamentary elections, with men and women participating as voters and candidates, and by the establishment of the Institute for Political Development to enhance democratic practices and a culture of dialogue in the Kingdom. The Arab Charter on Human Rights has been ratified and a counter-terrorism law has been passed. We have acceeded to the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Kingdom of Bahrain has been elected to membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council. We are working closely with other members to promote and protect human rights in all areas. We have enhanced the role of women in society to assume leadership positions in the Kingdom, including the judiciary. In addition, a programme to empower women, overseen by the Supreme Council for Women, has been approved.

We are forging a partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as was evident in the Forum for the Future hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain last November. At that Forum, NGOs worked side by side with Governments in discussing human rights, the fight against corruption, the rule of law and the empowerment of women. Indeed, Bahrain takes pride in having the largest number of NGOs in proportion to its population, with approximately 300 registered NGOs.

We are addressing negative phenomena in the national economy, such as unemployment, by initiating a national project to provide jobs for the unemployed. Moreover, the Kingdom of Bahrain has consolidated its pioneering economic role in the Gulf region through laws to attract investment under the supervision of the Economic Development Board.

A high committee to reform education has been formed to develop and modernize the education system. Its recommendations were adopted in June 2006. The Kingdom of Bahrain has continued to rank high in human development, as confirmed in the latest United Nations Human Development Report. Positive integrated development on the political, social, cultural and economic levels was further evidenced by the recommendations of the National Conference for Social Policies in the Kingdom of Bahrain, held in the

spring of this year under the auspices of the United Nations, which aimed to promote integration and cohesion of all aspects and components of development.

We in the Kingdom of Bahrain still view the phenomenon of terrorism and terrorist acts in many parts of the world as the most dangerous threat to international peace and security. There must be greater effort by the international community and more coordination on all levels to confront and contain this scourge. The Kingdom commends United Nations efforts to fight terrorism. The Secretary-General's report issued last April entitled "Uniting against terrorism: recommendations for a global counter-terrorism strategy" (A/60/825) contains many constructive elements that we embrace, along with other points that need further examination and discussion. It is important that any counter-terrorism strategy not infringe on human rights or fundamental freedoms, while complying with international law. One of the positive aspects of that report is its call to address issues that are exploited by terrorists and to study the motives behind terrorism.

The Kingdom of Bahrain has continued its tireless efforts in this field. In fact, it has already signed 11 of the 12 international agreements on terrorism and hosts the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force established in November 2004 to combat money-laundering and terrorist financing. In addition, Bahrain continuously coordinates efforts with its brotherly neighbours of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), pursuant to the GCC Counter-Terrorism Agreement adopted in May 2004. Implementation of the strategy proposed in the Secretary-General's report is just a beginning, as the report states. What is more important is its full implementation.

The events in the Middle East in recent months, especially in Gaza, the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank and then during the past few weeks in Lebanon, have driven the entire region to the edge of an abyss that could become even more dangerous. We must all work more diligently to address the root causes and repercussions of this struggle, which frustrates hopes for peace and disappoints the aspirations of the peoples of the region for peace, stability and security.

Resolution of this catastrophic situation, with its dire consequences, must not be delayed. The international community has special and multiple responsibilities in this regard. Therefore the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers called upon the Security Council to meet at the ministerial level. That meeting was held yesterday to discuss all tracks in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process, relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, which was presented by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and adopted by the Arab summits. A settlement should be pursued through a new and developed mechanism to resume direct negotiations among the parties under the Council's supervision, within a specified time limit and with international guarantees.

We wish to express our deep concern at the bloody events and huge destruction that took place in brotherly Lebanon this year caused by Israeli military operations. On the basis of our concern for the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon, we support resolution 1701 (2006) and the need for all parties to comply with it. We also affirm the importance of the international community's support for the seven points set out by His Excellency Mr. Fouad Siniora, Prime Minister of Lebanon, to complement that resolution. We reaffirm that the Kingdom of Bahrain stands with the Republic of Lebanon against anything that endangers its sovereignty and territorial integrity and support it with a view to preventing any act outside Lebanese State authority that endangers its stability. We also express our appreciation for the efforts of the Arab Tripartite Committee on Lebanon, the State of Qatar — the Arab member of the Security Council — and all other States that have supported the Arab position.

The Kingdom of Bahrain realizes that Lebanon, today, faces great challenges that require concerted international efforts by the United Nations, the European Union and all influential Powers. Such efforts must be aimed not solely at keeping the peace but also at rebuilding and reviving the economy with the help of the Lebanese Government and people, so that Lebanon can participate once again, as it has done through the centuries, in the cultural and economic development of the Middle East and the world at large. In this regard, the recent Stockholm Conference was a step in the right direction.

We reiterate our position that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East necessitates, first and foremost, that Israel withdraw fully from all Arab territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories. It also requires the return of Palestinian refugees and the establishment of a Palestinian State on all occupied Palestinian lands, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The Kingdom of Bahrain welcomes the recent positive developments in Iraq, including the election of a national assembly and the formation of a permanent Iraqi Government. The Kingdom of Bahrain also welcomes the Iraqi Government's steps to promote genuine national reconciliation and accord and to consolidate peace, stability, and dialogue among all segments of society. Bahrain hopes that the Government's national reconciliation measures will put an end to violence and the killing of innocent civilians, restore stability and preserve Iraq's unity and cohesion. We also hope that these measures will lead to renunciation of violence and to addressing the waves of killing, sectarianism and extremism, so that a new safe and unified Iraq can emerge and enjoy democracy and the rule of law, an Iraq with close relations with its Arab and Islamic brothers and one that adheres to its international commitments and responsibilities. There is no doubt that the Iraqi Government's efforts in this direction are supported by the pivotal role that Iraq's neighbouring countries have played in reinforcing their good-neighbourly policies, through respect for Iraq's sovereignty, cooperation in controlling the borders and non-interference in Iraq's internal affairs.

The Kingdom of Bahrain, together with the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, calls for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran concerning the three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, which belong to brotherly United Arab Emirates. This dispute should be settled either through negotiations or by referring it to the International Court of Justice for adjudication.

Within the framework of maintaining regional security in the Gulf region, we confirm that friendly relations among Gulf countries should be based on respect for the principles of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, good-neighbourliness, non-interference in internal affairs and peaceful settlement of disputes. This would create a positive atmosphere that would help address issues in a spirit of conciliation and in accordance with international law, particularly on the issue of the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, in order not to threaten the security, economic and environmental concerns of the countries of the region and help them avoid the dangers of confrontation and tension. To support the creation of such a positive environment, we should work together to make the Middle East, including the Gulf region, a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, we affirm the right of States to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, in accordance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and under the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards regime.

Today, all of us need to join in efforts to achieve the objective of a collective security system through multilateral diplomacy, for which the United Nations is the main arena. Through your presidency, Madam, we hope that our efforts will yield new measures to reform the Organization. In his report on the work of the Organization (A/61/1), the Secretary-General states that no reform of the United Nations will be complete without the reform of the Security Council, which should be more representative of today's geopolitical realities. This would make it more efficient and transparent. Furthermore, we hail the establishment this year of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council.

The gap between developed and developing countries remains wide in the areas of economic, human, scientific and technological development. Developing countries must redouble their efforts to bridge this gap and mitigate its negative impact. They need to promote good governance, uphold human rights, expand democratic participation, enhance transparency, empower women and enhance their role on the international stage. However, they cannot achieve this by themselves: developed countries must continue their commitment to offer support and assistance by cancelling debts and supplying developing countries with the knowledge, up-to-date technology and expertise they need to achieve sustainable development.

The Millennium Development Goals are the best road map towards sustainable development. Those Goals can be reached only through an international strategic partnership between developed and developing countries, along with international

organizations and agencies, in particular the United Nations, and with the participation of civil society institutions and the private sector, in view of the vital national and international role they play.

It is true to say that changes in the world situation and great progress achieved by the international community have brought human civilization to wider horizons in which there is no excuse for excluding or marginalizing others. We believe that there is plenty of room for dialogue and positive diversity. This is because we, as nations, are linked in a single international civilization, one that is rich in religions and cultures and within which we can explore everything that can bring peace and stability to the whole world.

In conclusion, Madam, we hope that, under your presidency, this session will be marked by the spirit of reform that has pervaded the United Nations. We confirm the need to unify our efforts and exercise patience and flexibility in order to achieve reform and development. The Kingdom of Bahrain is committed to achieving those goals and will support efforts to strengthen the United Nations and its position in the world.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ivailo Kalfin, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Mr. Kalfin (Bulgaria): Allow me first of all to align myself with the very warm congratulations addressed to you, Madam President, on your election to your very important position. I would like to assure you once again of the full support of my country in your endeavours for further reform of our Organization and for the consolidation of its role in the coming year. I would also like to express our gratitude to the previous President of the General Assembly, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his dedicated and efficient work and for the achievements that were made in implementing United Nations reforms.

I would also like to greet the newest member of our large family, the Republic of Montenegro. I am sure that that country from our region, South-East Europe, will spare no effort in contributing to the work of the United Nations.

(*spoke in French*)

Bulgaria is on the threshold of a historic achievement. After 17 years of reforms to build political democracy and a market economy, my country is preparing to join the European Union (EU) on 1 January 2007. Our journey, although difficult, has been successful. I am certain that, as a new member of the Union, Bulgaria will contribute added value to the European Common Foreign and Security Policy. We will work with even greater determination for a strong and effective United Nations, which must be at the very centre of the global security and development system. Bulgaria endorses the position set out earlier by the Finnish presidency of the EU.

We welcome the fact that concrete outcomes have been achieved in implementation of the radical reform process launched at last year's World Summit. We hope that that the momentum will be maintained and that the process, which is necessary and useful for all Member countries, will move forward even more quickly.

I would like to express our profound respect and gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts throughout the past decade to strengthen the United Nations in a globalized world.

I would like to refer to the resolution that was recently adopted on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. The implementation of the resolution should lead to enhanced coordination of the work of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, and to a strengthened role for the President of the General Assembly, a streamlined agenda and improved methods of work.

No United Nations reform effort would be complete without the crucial element of Security Council reform. Despite all the efforts made, we have not yet been able to reach consensus on a viable formula for Council expansion that can be supported by all Member States. Bulgaria believes that any reform exercise should increase the representativity and legitimacy of the Council, while preserving the effectiveness of its decisions and its key role in maintaining peace and security. We also support efforts to improve its working methods.

At the level of institutional reform, two new United Nations bodies have been established: the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council. Their potential will be realized in the future. There are certain areas, however, where the desired progress is far from being achieved: mandate review, the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council,

ensuring effective management and promoting coordination among the agencies and bodies of the United Nations system. Despite the challenges, our work must continue at an accelerated pace with a view to the achievement of concrete results during this session.

I would like to point out that yesterday Bulgaria deposited its instruments of ratification relating to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations Convention against Corruption. We also attach great importance to combating the traffic in human beings and drugs, as well as to the fight against organized crime.

Five years on from 11 September 2001, terrorism in all its manifestations continues to pose a genuine threat to human civilization. That is why Bulgaria welcomes the launching of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy to fight that scourge at all levels. The consensus that has emerged regarding the Strategy must give impetus to the process of adopting a comprehensive international convention on terrorism, in accordance with the decisions taken at the 2005 World Summit. Such a convention would provide the international community with an effective, comprehensive, universal legal framework for the fight against that scourge and give substance to its firm condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

Bulgaria supports all initiatives to promote dialogue and mutual understanding among people of different religions, ethnic groups and cultures. Bulgarian history and our national experience have always been characterized by dialogue and tolerance. In this context, we look forward to the recommendations of the High-Level Panel of the Alliance of Civilizations, and we will take part in their implementation.

Bulgaria pursues a policy aimed at promoting effective arms control, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and disarmament. We are concerned about the genuine threat of destabilization affecting legal instruments currently in force, in particular the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), because of non-compliance with obligations and unilateral withdrawals by certain States.

We support the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We firmly believe that the unresolved question of the Iranian nuclear programme should be dealt with promptly, on the basis of Security Council resolution 1696 (2006) and relevant decisions of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Likewise, we call for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1695 (2006) and urge progress in the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear problem.

The United Nations must be endowed with sufficient capacity to enable it to deploy multidimensional peacekeeping operations that are aimed not just at maintaining peace, but also at strengthening the sovereignty of States and building democratic institutions that will guarantee the stability of peace processes. In this context, I would like to point out that yesterday Bulgaria signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Security of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

As a member of NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as a future member of the European Union and as a country that contributes troops to peacekeeping operations, Bulgaria actively promotes effective partnership and cooperation among the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in activities aimed at conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Current cooperation between the European Union, the United Nations and the African Union is an encouraging example of such cooperation, which is already bearing fruit.

My country is actively contributing to long-term security and stability in South-East Europe. We welcome the fact that the Balkans are now seen as a region, not of crisis and conflict, but of cooperation and integration. One convincing example of political cooperation among the countries of that region is the South-East Europe Cooperation Process. Bulgaria is preparing to assume the chairmanship of that Process in mid-2007, and we will work tirelessly to ensure that that structure can support regional cooperation and promote European and Euro-Atlantic integration in that part of Europe.

In addressing our geographic region, I cannot overlook the problem of Kosovo. Reaching a decision on the future status of that province is on the agenda of the international community. Bulgaria is playing a very

active role in efforts aimed at creating the atmosphere of trust and openness necessary for the holding of such negotiations. We fully support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, in his efforts to find a solution, based on the maximum amount of common ground, to which both parties could agree. We call on the international community to let itself be guided by the principles of sustainability, monitoring, regional stability and the European perspective in working out a final decision on the status of Kosovo.

Bulgaria attaches particular importance to the situation in the Middle East. We welcome and support the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Security Council, as well as the key role being played by the European Union in the expanded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which is called on to ensure peace in southern Lebanon in implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). Bulgaria will make its own contribution to the international community's efforts to bring about lasting peace.

We remain convinced that the crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations would be best resolved by direct negotiations between the countries concerned, based on an absolute rejection of the use of force and with the necessary support of the international community. We support all of the efforts to that end on the part of the Quartet, as presented yesterday here at the United Nations.

Bulgaria greatly appreciates United Nations initiatives relating to the stabilization of the political and constitutional process in Iraq, as well as the principles set out in the International Compact. We will continue to meet our obligations in Iraq in support of national institutions aimed at providing for the security and prosperity of that country.

We support all positive trends towards strengthening the sovereignty of Afghanistan. During the past year, my country doubled its participation in the International Security Assistance Force. We support the Afghanistan Compact adopted at the London Conference a few months ago.

We welcome the adoption of Security Council resolution 1706 (2006), whose implementation will assist in the implementation of the political agreements recently reached on the Sudan. In our view, the international community must take urgent action to address the humanitarian tragedy in Darfur.

Bulgaria, with more than 50 years' experience as an active and responsible Member of our Organization, and which has served three terms in the Security Council and held the presidency of the General Assembly for one year, has submitted its candidacy to the Economic and Social Council for the period 2007-2009. I am convinced that our country's experience and expertise, as well as its commitment to contribute to strengthening the effectiveness of the United Nations, are important reasons to support our candidacy.

(*spoke in English*)

We are witnessing and also taking an active part in the implementation of the most important reform since the United Nations was founded. Today more than ever before, the peoples of the world need our Organization to help establish long-lasting peace, prosperity and a better future for new generations. We must succeed in reforming the United Nations so that it can change the world for the better.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Winston Peters, Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand.

Mr. Peters (New Zealand): New Zealand remains unwavering in its support for the United Nations. Our commitment has not changed since we helped found the Organization 61 years ago. This year's events have only reinforced our belief that the world would be substantially worse off without the United Nations.

It would be remiss of me at this time not to pay tribute to Kofi Annan. It is to his vision, determination and courage that we must attribute many of the reforms achieved thus far. Five years ago, when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the Nobel Committee paid tribute to his efforts on reform. Since then he has continued to work tirelessly for a United Nations that can live up to the hopes that "we the peoples" have invested in it. This is all the more remarkable given that, for much of his stewardship, the United Nations has been confronted with some of the most difficult international crises of its existence.

New Zealand is committed to multilateralism. This is not some act of faith, but a commitment to a multilateralism that really delivers. We need to be prepared to work diligently for the good of the global community.

The United Nations is passing through a period of challenge to its relevance and effectiveness. It has

confronted serious political and security shocks — fresh hostilities in the Middle East, the tragic and worsening situation in Darfur, and, in our own region, instability in Timor-Leste.

Last year, world leaders agreed to an ambitious reform agenda based on the three pillars of peace and security, development and human rights. Progress has been made, but this is no time to rest. We must press on, for much remains to be done.

The challenge of development has never been higher on the international agenda. Never before has the commitment to eradicating poverty been so critical. But increasing aid levels will not be enough; we must become more effective. We need to make sure that every dollar we spend makes a positive difference. That means addressing the key threats to our success — poor governance, corruption and gender inequality. We need to secure fairer international trading relationships, and we must work on all of those together.

The theme of this year's general debate is the implementation of a global partnership for development. For New Zealand, collective action is imperative. We need participation, ownership and responsibility from recipient countries. We seek harmonization with larger contributors to align and combine our contributions. We seek partnership with multilateral development agencies in our campaign to eradicate poverty, and we endorse the efforts of the United Nations and those agencies to coordinate better, country by country.

New Zealand, as members are aware, has a relationship with the Pacific that is based on history, culture and economic and social linkages. Our bonds with Pacific States are an important dimension of our other relationships. We want nothing less than educated, healthy, well-governed, economically prosperous and safe communities.

In the Auckland Declaration of 2004, Pacific leaders committed themselves to a "region that is respected for the quality of its governance, the sustainable management of its resources, the full observance of democratic values and for its defence and promotion of human rights". These are ambitious goals, and translating them into reality means hard work by all Pacific countries. That is a challenge that New Zealand accepts.

In facing that challenge, we confront economic, environmental, governance, development and security issues. Markets are distant. Climate change is a reality. Political instability does not help. Threats from communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and pandemic influenza must be managed.

The Pacific accounts for almost one quarter of the surface of the world — an area bigger than Europe and the Middle East combined. Its strategic significance presents opportunity and challenge. New Zealand is determined to seek out the benefits of that significance and guard against the threats, among which I include, sadly, cheque-book diplomacy.

Across the Pacific, we have learned that regional problems require regional solutions. Last year, Pacific Island Forum leaders adopted the Pacific Plan for regional cooperation. Through that plan we will strengthen regional cooperation where it can most make a difference, and we will use it to promote the four goals of the Pacific Islands Forum: sustainable development, economic growth, security and good governance.

At the same time, we do not forget that our regional endeavours depend on strong international frameworks. The Framework Convention on Climate Change is an essential example. Another example is the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement on the conservation and management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks.

We are proud of our achievements in regional fisheries management. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, with its headquarters in Pohnpei, manages the region's migratory fish species. We are in the midst of developing new regional arrangements for non-migratory fish stocks.

These mechanisms are central to the region's ability to ensure the sustainable management of its most important natural resources. They are at the leading edge in establishing best-practice management norms.

There have been profound political and security shocks over the past year — in the Middle East and in Darfur, as well as instability in Timor-Leste — those and more are testing the United Nations system.

It is a sad reality that the situation in the Middle East has been on the agenda of the United Nations for 60 years, ever since its inception. The lack of sustained

political will to see through more than a handful of decisions on the Middle East has undermined confidence. It has contributed to an unstable environment where extremism, injustice and despair flourish.

These issues must be tackled with a new resolve, using the international multilateral system as a tool for peace and progress. The international response to the Security Council's call for an expanded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) shows that the international community can react to conflict and provide basic stabilization. But such responses are doomed to failure unless the underlying political and security issues are addressed. It is therefore imperative to relaunch the Middle East peace process covering all issues, on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Organization's efforts to introduce a United Nations force into Darfur is being cynically thwarted by the Government of the Sudan. That is simply unconscionable. The Government of the Sudan must, in the name of basic humanity, accept the need for a United Nations force as the best chance for the security of the people of Darfur.

New and fragile States face enormous challenges. Recent unrest in Timor-Leste demonstrates that fact. New Zealand responded quickly to Timor-Leste's needs with a military and police contribution to help restore stability. The regional response has been swift and robust. The United Nations played an important role in facilitating Timor-Leste's independence, and it is clear the United Nations will continue to be involved in Timor-Leste for many years to come. The deployment of a substantial United Nations police force is vital if peace and stability is to be maintained even in the medium term. The nature of the expanded United Nations mission in Timor-Leste reflects the deep and broad engagement required to build a lasting peace. Timor-Leste encapsulates the principle that peace and security cannot be separated from economic development, social reconciliation and the protection of basic human rights. The Security Council's mandate for Timor-Leste endorses that truth.

New Zealand fully supported the renewed focus on human rights at last year's World Summit. We strongly campaigned for the new Human Rights Council, and we worked hard to bring it into being. We have high ambitions for it and will follow its activities closely. It must remain strong, focused and effective. It must be able to deal swiftly with emerging situations of human rights concern, in a balanced way, with scrupulous attention to verifiable facts. It must be aspirational, inspirational and practical. Its working methods must be transparent and inclusive. Above all, there must be genuine political will to make it work.

A few weeks ago, encouraged all the way by energetic non-governmental organizations, Member States agreed on the first new comprehensive human rights instrument of the twenty-first century: a draft convention relating to persons with disabilities. We are proud in New Zealand of the role we played in those negotiations on the text. The draft convention stands to make a real difference to the lives of approximately 650 million of the world's most disadvantaged citizens.

New Zealand is also conscious of the disadvantages faced by indigenous peoples in many parts of the world. We were closely engaged in the lengthy negotiations towards a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We had hoped that the declaration would be a new standard of achievement for Governments that could be implemented to really improve the lives of indigenous peoples. Therefore, we are disappointed that that was not to be so. The draft declaration that emerged with less than conclusive support from the Human Rights Council is deeply flawed and represents a lost opportunity for the world's indigenous peoples.

At the beginning of his term, the Secretary-General set an important goal for the United Nations: to perfect "the triangle of development, freedom and peace" (*A/51/PV.88, p. 13*). The Secretary-General's words still ring true today. We have travelled only part of the journey towards that goal. Considering our achievements over the past year, we can be satisfied with progress made in setting up the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. The challenge now is to make those two new bodies truly effective. The welcome adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288) reminds us of the efforts we must continue to make at regional and national levels.

New Zealand wants to see continuing reform high on the list of priorities for the sixty-first session in order to ensure that the United Nations can be as responsive as possible to the needs of Member States,

and efficient in getting the best from the resources available to it.

Sixty years ago, New Zealand had high hopes for the United Nations. In 2006, we still do. New Zealand is a country that engages with the United Nations with no hidden agenda. What we say is what we mean. We engage with no other or hidden agenda. But those that do so pervert and weaken this Organization.

In 2006, at this meeting, New Zealand declares that we will continue to put our efforts behind the principles and policies that will make the United Nations strong.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Dora Bakoyannis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece.

Ms. Bakoyannis (Greece): Allow me, Madam, to add my heartiest congratulations to you on being the third woman in the history of the United Nations to be elected President of the General Assembly, particularly at such a critical moment. Your election is an inspiration for women everywhere who are struggling to achieve equality and opportunity. You illustrate the truth that, as Plato wrote 2,400 years ago, any society that does not exploit the talents of its women is wasting half of its resources. I also wish to congratulate and thank your predecessor, my friend and colleague Jan Eliasson, for all he worked so hard to achieve during his term.

While we are recognizing service to the United Nations, we would be remiss if we did not extend our appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan. I want to express the appreciation of my Government for all his efforts to maintain and strengthen the prestige and moral authority of the Organization.

I would also like to welcome Montenegro to the family of States.

(*spoke in French*)

Greece fully aligns itself with the statement made by the President of Finland on behalf of the European Union (EU). We would also like to express our views on the major questions that the United Nations will be dealing with in the session that is now opening.

It is just the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the future looks threatening: we see poverty, war, humanitarian crises, refugee flows, terrorism, arms proliferation, human trafficking, drugs, sectarian violence, environmental degradation and natural disasters. In order to understand the full extent of these calamities, we must identify and understand, and then deal with, their roots, which have been formed over the centuries. We have to unite the force of our ideas and resources and mobilize what we have in common — that is, our humanity. As taught to us by the philosopher Isocrates, the condition for peace is not money, which buys men, or force, which subjugates them; it is the all-encompassing power of goodwill.

The United Nations is a unique forum, the place where, as individuals and as nations, we offer the best of ourselves. We need this Organization to be strong and productive. We draw from it the strength that frees us from mistrust to overcome conflicts, the strength that allows us to move forwards towards greater understanding and tolerance.

Terrorism is the scourge of our times. It is a blind evil that takes no account of our religion, our race or our gender. This danger must be confronted collectively. It is neither possible nor desirable to confront it alone. We will firmly support the efforts undertaken by the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee, and we are prepared to provide it with all necessary assistance. Finally, we would like to support the counter-terrorism policy that the Secretary-General will soon be presenting to the General Assembly. The best way to confront terrorism is to promote peace, tolerance, the acceptance of others and, above all, development: no longer to abandon anyone by the wayside and to give everyone the opportunity to access what is essential for life.

In the light of what I have said, and bearing in mind the General Assembly's main theme for this year — to create a global partnership for development — this is both timely and appropriate. Translating this vision into fact must happen at the global level, and for this we need significant participation by all countries in the economic and financial decision-making process. The International Monetary Fund's recent decision to increase the voting rights of countries such as China and India is an important step in the right direction.

The news coming from the Doha round, however, is not encouraging. The clock is ticking; and each day it becomes even more important for all parties to put their shoulders to the wheel to reach an agreement, with the objective of creating an effective multilateral

trading system. The winners will be the developing countries — but also the developed countries.

Equally important is the need to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in line with the agenda established by heads of State or Government at the Summits of 2000 and 2005. Among our objectives, clearly, is to reach the critical threshold of 0.7 per cent of gross national income to be allocated for official development assistance to the countries most seriously affected by economic difficulties. That is the keystone of a global partnership for development, which we are committed to forging as soon as possible.

Developing countries, for their part, need to follow sensible economic policies. They need to undertaken reforms that will encourage growth, and they need to finally improve governance by creating institutions that are accountable and operate with complete transparency. It is only together, through collective action, that we will be able to correct the inequalities that are at the root of many of the conflicts in the world.

Allow me to stress in this respect that Africa must be the highest of our priorities. We must pay heed to the dormant conflicts in West Africa, East Africa and Central Africa if we want to avoid the kinds of crises being played out in the Sudan and other countries on the continent. The African Union is best placed to put an end to these conflicts, and we must help it by finding lasting solutions to the problems that make life so cruel in very many of these regions.

Another urgent need is to act effectively and speedily to put an end to the suffering of the populations of these countries, so that we no longer see babies dying of AIDS when a few dollars' worth of medicines can save them.

(*spoke in English*)

The tensions in the Middle East demand equal attention. The Middle East is the region that will test the mettle of this Organization as a force for peace in the immediate future. If we fail in that test, all of us stand to pay a heavy price. During the past several months, we all witnessed unforgettable images of suffering and destruction in that part of the world.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the root of most problems in the region, and it is obvious that it should be at the top of the list of our priorities if peace and stability are to return to that area. The Road Map offers the strategic plan for a solution based on the principle of land for peace, especially since basic elements of it are well known and generally accepted by the international community. The Road Map is in essence a performance-driven guide to a settlement based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and on the conclusions of the Madrid Conference and the Beirut Arab Summit. We must all make every effort to see that they are implemented.

On Lebanon, strict implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) provides the blueprint for resolving the basic problems that led to the recent crisis. We understand the difficulties before us, but we must push ahead resolutely, because determination and tenacity are essential to tackling long-standing issues in volatile regions.

The continued violence and instability in Iraq are a cause of great concern for all of us. It is critical that every possible effort be made to bring order and unity to that troubled country. Deaths, especially of civilians, have reached terrifying levels, with no end in sight to the slaughter. All who have any influence with the warring factions in Iraq must try to make them see what pain and suffering they have inflicted on their own people and what yet worse horrors they will unleash on their land if they continue to drift towards a devastating civil war.

Our own region, the Balkans, was once known as history's cauldron. We endured a century of bitter ethnic, religious and ideological conflicts, up to very recent times. We are moving rapidly, however, to disown that label for the sake of our own peoples and of the new Europe we are building. Some trouble spots remain, but we are trying to deal with them in a new spirit of cooperation and tolerance.

Kosovo is one issue that still needs attention. The status talks are under way, and we hope that they will produce a viable settlement that will strengthen the security and stability of the entire region. Right now, this appears difficult. To overcome the impasse will require patient and careful diplomacy. Our goal in reaching a viable long-term solution should not be compromised by setting an artificial deadline.

I deeply regret the fact that the Cyprus problem remains unresolved. For all 32 years of the military occupation of one third of the territory of Cyprus by well over 40,000 Turkish troops, Greece has strongly

supported every United Nations initiative aimed at the achievement of a comprehensive solution. We are committed to doing everything possible to achieve a just and viable solution, on the basis of the pertinent Security Council resolutions and of EU principles and values. We strive for a bizonal, bicommunal federation that will bring peace and prosperity to the island. Our goal remains a solution agreed between the two communities without arbitration and tight timetables, to be approved subsequently by referendums. To those efforts we are prepared to lend our wholehearted support.

Greece's foreign and security policy is based on the principles enshrined in the Charter, especially those relating to the peaceful settlement of disputes and good-neighbourly relations. This basic framework is also reflected in my country's continuing efforts to further improve relations with Turkey and to consolidate mutual understanding and cooperation. For our part, we are trying to overcome the remaining difficulties and are continuing to take initiatives to widen and deepen cooperation in all fields so that the relationship with Turkey becomes a win-win situation for both countries. In this context, we are hopeful that Turkey will reciprocate so that our countries can solidify good-neighbourly relations.

European integration is the bright promise on the horizon for the entire region of South-Eastern Europe — a future which will encompass greater cooperation and interaction among all the countries in the area and at long last heal the wounds of the past century.

We live in a troubled world, and the United Nations is always enmeshed in the worst of the troubles so that it sometimes seems that it is not accomplishing much. We must not forget, however, the conflicts it has resolved, the misery it has diminished, the suffering it has relieved and the pain it has eased all over the world in its brief lifetime.

"Man feeds on dreams of hope", Aeschylus wrote. For men, women and children everywhere, the United Nations remains the best hope there is.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore.

Mr. Yeo (Singapore): I join other countries in congratulating you, Madam, on your assumption of the presidency. We in Singapore pledge our full support to you.

The recent war in Lebanon had no clear victor. Israel succeeded in removing the immediate threat across the border, but could not wipe out Hizbollah. Hizbollah claimed victory, having survived Israeli air bombardments and ground action, even though enormous damage was inflicted on Lebanon. On both sides, innocent people have suffered greatly. Whether the present ceasefire can become a lasting peace depends on many factors, not least the ability of the Lebanese army and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to maintain the buffer in southern Lebanon. But one thing is clear: without the eventual intervention of the United Nations, the fighting would have continued and more lives would have been lost.

The Middle East is going through the throes of change. In Palestine, there is no escaping a two-State solution. However, defining the precise boundaries of that solution is a grinding process which will take time. No one can achieve all his demands; no party can insist on absolute security. A new balance is being established between Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere in the region. This will also take time. In many countries, there is tension between those who are impatient for change and those who believe that discontinuity will lead to chaos and anarchy. As long as there is more despair than hope, terrorist organizations will be able to find fresh recruits. What happens in the Middle East affects the entire world. No country is insulated, and certainly not from the terrorist threat or from high energy prices.

No grand solution is possible. The end of the cold war marked the end of an era when the major Powers could settle the terms among themselves over the heads of lesser countries. It was not that long ago — but it seems so strange today — that a cold peace could have been maintained for decades by each side pointing tens of thousands of nuclear missiles at the other. Technology has changed the rules. Warfare has now become asymmetric. Cruise missiles and submarines cannot solve the problem of suicide bombers. And those who manipulate these terrorists might well take positions in global financial markets to benefit from the havoc that they create.

In a sense, technology has globalized the world and broken it into smaller pieces. Empires have broken up. New countries have been born. In large countries,

power has devolved downwards and regions have become more assertive. It has become a messier world, which presents new challenges to global governance. Improving global governance from above sometimes seems like an impossible task. Take the reform of the United Nations, for example: despite all the efforts made and the fine speeches delivered, the results have been quite modest.

The near-collapse of the Doha talks is another example of how difficult it is to effect change from the top down. When the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was formed in 1948, there were only 23 members. Today, the World Trade Organization has 149 members. No country or group of countries seems able or willing to take the lead in brokering a compromise. We must hope that Director-General Pascal Lamy will succeed in his heroic efforts to rescue the Doha development round from failure.

There are other areas in which global action is needed, but is insufficient. All of us worry about global climate change, but how can there be consensus when the costs and benefits are distributed so unevenly and the major polluters are unwilling to accept responsibility? We hear dire warnings from the World Health Organization about a global flu pandemic, yet our collective response is so feeble.

While we should never give up hope on global initiatives, we should be realistic, because achieving global consensus in a multipolar world is, to say the least, challenging. When Governments have to win elections, they are more likely to respond to short-term political needs than to worry about long-term global concerns. We can often do more at the regional level: at the regional level, the stakes are clearer to our constituencies and the need for action is easier to explain. The Charter recognizes the role that regional arrangements can play in helping the United Nations to achieve its objectives.

In a globalized world with porous borders, regional cooperation can often bring quick benefits. We need only consider, for example, the simple act of reopening, three months ago, after 44 years, the Nathu La pass in the Himalayas between China and India. Immediately, on both sides of the pass, ordinary people benefited from trade and travel. New problems will arise, of course, but they can be managed.

All over the world now, regional initiatives are proliferating. Many overlap. Some are modest in their objectives, providing forums for public and private sector leaders to meet and consult. Others are more ambitious, creating regional free-trade areas or fostering joint efforts against problems like drug trafficking and terrorism. Many of these regional initiatives are open and inclusive, and should be encouraged. Those which are superfluous will gradually wither away. Some can make significant contributions to global governance and reduce the burdens borne by the big Powers. International organizations like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Environment Programme should work with them, strengthen their capabilities and encourage mutual learning. These initiatives create a habit of cooperation among neighbouring countries and reduce misunderstanding.

In Asia, the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has not only been beneficial to the 10 countries of South-East Asia; it has also helped to create a larger architecture of cooperation. Founded 39 years ago, in 1967, when the war in Indo-China was raging, ASEAN began as a grouping to promote what then-President Suharto of Indonesia called "regional resilience". The original five non-communist countries of ASEAN — Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore — were determined to keep the peace among ourselves and concentrate on economic development. Brunei Darussalam joined ASEAN in 1984 after it became independent. With the end of the cold war, peace returned to Indochina and ASEAN gradually expanded to include the newer member States of Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, to become what it is today: a community of 10.

In 1992, the countries of ASEAN decided to establish a free trade area in stages. For trade in goods, we have largely attained our objectives. For investment and services, we still have some way to go. But there is considerable political will to press on and make the whole of ASEAN one economic space. Already, ASEAN as a grouping plays a major role in international trade, accounting for some 6 per cent of total world trade.

The re-emergence of China and India as major Powers presents us with opportunities as well as challenges. ASEAN's trade with both is growing rapidly. But they are also a competitive challenge to us.

When the leaders of ASEAN met in Bali three years ago, they took a major decision: to establish an ASEAN Community by 2020 with three main pillars — security, economic cooperation and cultural cooperation. To create such a community, an ASEAN charter will be drawn up next year to provide the legal basis for our future integration. It will include provisions for dispute settlement by independent panels.

The European Union is an inspiration to us in ASEAN. Two months ago, the European Commission hosted members of an ASEAN eminent persons group and generously offered advice and assistance. While ASEAN integration will never be as deep or as broad as that of the European Union, there is much that we can learn from the European experience.

For ASEAN to prosper, it is important that we maintain good relations with all the major Powers. For many years now, ASEAN has promoted good relations with our dialogue partners, including the United States, the European Union, Russia, China, Japan and India. With strong growth in global trade, ASEAN has negotiated or is in the process of negotiating free trade agreements with China, India, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand, and closer economic partnerships with the United States and the European Union. We have a simple strategy, which is to give all of them a strong stake in our unity and in our development. Strategically, some of the most important sea lanes pass through ASEAN waters. About a third of global trade, half of global oil trade and 80 per cent of the oil bound for China and Japan pass through the straits of Malacca and Singapore.

Through the ASEAN-plus groupings and the East Asia Summit, which includes China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand, we are creating a new architecture of peaceful cooperative development in the larger Asia. ASEAN is not big enough to be a major global player, but ASEAN plays a significant role in holding Asia together and keeping it open to the rest of the world. Whatever we do in Asia must not cause the United States, the European Union or Russia to think that we are excluding them.

ASEAN is a work in progress. Like other regions in the world, we face many problems, related to economic development, separatist movements, terrorism, drug trafficking, environmental degradation, maritime security, ethnic and religious divisions and avian flu, among other issues. However, what each of us in ASEAN has come to appreciate is that, without ASEAN, each of these problems is much harder to solve, and that ASEAN alone cannot solve any of them: we have to be united and work with other countries and with international organizations. We are grateful for their assistance, their partnership and their cooperation.

Madam President, ASEAN strongly supports you and the United Nations. We will work with you to improve the workings of the United Nations and to make it more effective. In this regard, ASEAN continues to endorse the candidature of Mr. Surakiart Sathirathai as the next Secretary-General despite the recent coup in Thailand. Although the coup was a setback to both Thailand and ASEAN, Thai society has a deep resilience which will enable it to recover quickly. ASEAN will always be on the side of the Thai people.

If every region in the world, working with the United Nations, can help to stabilize its own immediate environment and promote favourable conditions for development, the prospects for global peace will be enhanced. What the nations of Africa have been able to do despite adverse circumstances is impressive. The willingness of individual African countries to agree on common positions is unique to that continent and is an inspiration to the rest of us.

The United Nations is already stretched and can only do so much. Instead, let us, in each of our regions, do our part and work with the United Nations and its organizations in a complementary way. In order to stop the killing Darfur, for example, we need close cooperation between the United Nations and African countries.

Wherever possible, regional organizations should be strengthened. The United Nations and other international organizations can play a facilitating role, provide resources and advice, set standards and establish benchmarks. Even in the Middle East, where the work often seems hardest, regional cooperation can help create a better environment for peace and development. For example, the reconstruction of Iraq will be much more difficult, if not impossible, without the goodwill of its neighbours.

With over 500 million people, ASEAN has 8 per cent of the world's population. Our share of global gross domestic product is much lower, at 2 per cent.

But within the limits of our modest capabilities, we in ASEAN will do our part to contribute to the good work of the United Nations in making this a better world, not adding to its problems.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alberto Gatmaitan Romulo, Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines.

Mr. Romulo (Philippines): It gives me great pleasure, Madam, to extend to you the felicitations of my Government and our people, and my own congratulations, on your well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly. My delegation stands ready to extend to you its fullest cooperation, not only as a member of your Bureau, but as a close friend of Bahrain as well. Your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, has left an indelible impression on the United Nations. Under his leadership, we were able to carry out a substantial part of the package of reforms mandated by the largest gathering of world leaders, as set out in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1).

Last year, our leaders met to commemorate 60 years of the United Nations. That meeting gave all of us renewed hopes for peace, growth, progress and the pre-eminence of the rights of all peoples. Those hopes remain, even in the face of continuing threats to the peace and security of mankind posed by terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons; even in the face of grinding poverty and financial uncertainty; even in the face of intolerance and misunderstanding; and, certainly, in the face of the fast-changing nature of our world.

Those hopes remain because the spirit of cooperation and community, which lies at the very heart of our Charter, lives on. Cooperation remains the key to reaching the goals set by our Charter. Cooperation, according to a twentieth-century philosopher, is the only thing that will redeem mankind.

It is in that spirit that the Philippines welcomes and supports the continued work of the Middle East Quartet and its call this week for greater progress towards a just and comprehensive peace. We strongly support the Road Map to peace and maintain our hopes for the realization of the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Together with the other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), we were gravely concerned over the deteriorating situation and the escalation of violence in the Middle East, particularly the disproportionate, indiscriminate and excessive use of force in Lebanon. The United Nations peacekeeping operation now under way in Lebanon renews our hope for peace and offers a great opportunity for the United Nations to demonstrate its relevance and its impact on the world stage.

Our own quest for peace in the Philippines is boldly moving forward, thanks to the support and cooperation of key members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and other members of the international community.

Our own experience as a country is convincing proof of the efficacy of collective action in fighting terrorism. Working closely with our neighbours and others, we are ridding our country of terrorists. The recent adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288) will help to strike another blow against terrorists. I commend the Permanent Representatives of Spain and Singapore for having successfully steered the negotiations on the Strategy.

One of the anchors of the Strategy is an initiative that is a primary concern of my country: the promotion of interfaith dialogue and cooperation. In pursuit of that initiative, the Philippines organized and chaired two key meetings held yesterday here at the United Nations: the First Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and the High-level Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace. As founder and current Chair of the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace — a new movement of Governments, United Nations agencies and religious non-governmental organizations accredited to the United Nations — the Philippines will initiate the holding of another high-level tripartite conference, this time to focus on the issue of small arms and light weapons.

In addition, the Philippines announced last week, at the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, that we will organize and convene a special ministerial meeting on interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace in the city of Davao, in southern Philippines. Meanwhile, I commend Spain and Turkey for their new initiative on the Alliance of Civilizations. I believe that it will

complement and reinforce, in a mutually inclusive manner, the Philippine initiative on interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace.

We have barely nine years left to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), set by our leaders, of cutting poverty in half by 2015. That target could remain a mere vision if no effective mechanism for resource mobilization is found. It is in that context that the Philippine initiative on debt for equity in MDG projects was launched last year; I thank the Group of 77 and China for its support. This initiative does not call for debt cancellation, a debt moratorium or debt reduction; it merely calls for the use of part of the payments from the debt stock of low- and medium-income developing countries not eligible under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative as equity for creditors in MDG projects in areas such as infrastructure, education, employment and health.

Multilateral cooperation in the field of energy security continues to grow in importance. Alternative sources of energy have to be developed. My delegation recommends that the Secretary-General appoint a group of eminent persons to look into this matter. The output of such a group should be the subject of a high-level dialogue before the current session ends.

One of the historic achievements of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly was the decision to establish the Central Emergency Response Fund for the rapid deployment of relief and assistance to countries stricken by natural disasters. The Philippines ranks third globally in terms of the number of people exposed to earthquakes and tropical cyclones annually. For that reason, the Philippines calls on all nations to support the Fund. We also call for enhanced cooperation aimed at effective responses to natural disasters.

International migration and development was the subject of last week's High-level Dialogue. That is an issue that is close to our hearts. Approximately one tenth of the population of the Philippines lives overseas. We are the largest supplier of seafarers, and our land-based workers can be found in practically all parts of the world.

Bearing that in mind, the Philippines joined the call for the creation of an informal global forum on migration and development as an outcome of the High-level Dialogue, provisionally outside the umbrella of the United Nations, to enable the international community to continue the dialogue on important issues relating to migration. My delegation invites Member States to accede to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in order to demonstrate and reaffirm the universality of human rights.

For my country and its people, human rights and the sanctity of the life of the individual are of paramount value. For my Government, the protection of human life is a sacred commitment. Last week, the Philippines renewed that commitment through the signing of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Enshrined in our constitution is powerful language against the death penalty. Three months ago, President Arroyo gave that constitutional mandate further expression when she signed into law Republic Act 9346, which removed the death penalty from our statute books.

Such is the value that we assign to life that, in our constitution, we are bound to protect the life of the unborn child. Through the signing of the Second Optional Protocol, the Philippine Government re-emphasized its unrelenting commitment to strengthening the protection of human rights.

I should like to take this opportunity to express the profound appreciation of the Philippines and of ASEAN to the outgoing Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for his dedicated and tireless service to the United Nations. He leaves behind a more invigorated and dynamic Organization, a legacy of reform with new and needed institutions such as the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, and an eloquent recommitment on the part of the United Nations and its membership to alleviating the plight of the less fortunate through the articulation of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Philippines is particularly appreciative of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's support and cooperation during our recent term as a Security Council member during the biennium 2004-2005 and for his steadfast support for the Philippines interfaith dialogue initiative.

Two world wars ago, Mr. Woodrow Wilson, an advocate of a global organization, defined power in terms that are still relevant today. He said: "Power

consists in one's capacity to link his will with the purpose of others, to lead by reason and a gift of cooperation". The drafters of our Charter and the challenges of the present provide us with the reason. We must now find within ourselves, as nations and as peoples, the gift of cooperation.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Youssouf Ouédraogo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Ouédraogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): Madam President, Burkina Faso is pleased to see you presiding over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Please be assured of the full cooperation of my delegation, which will spare no effort to help your noble mission succeed. I would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. Jan Eliasson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, who successfully guided the work of the Assembly at the sixtieth session.

This session is being held at a time when peace and security are seeing their foundations severely shaken in several regions of the world. Areas of tension persist in Africa, despite recent efforts to dispel them. That is the case, for example, in the Sudan, Somalia and Côte d'Ivoire. Fortunately, fighting has ceased in several countries, thus opening up real opportunities for progress and development.

In Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Burundi, democracy and building the rule of law have now become a reality. That is proof that nothing, absolutely nothing, can replace the political will of people to engage fully in inclusive and constructive dialogue. We very much hope that the democratic process which is under way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be successfully pursued. Likewise, we welcome the progress made in the inter-Togolese political dialogue. Having had the privilege of following that process as a facilitator, President Blaise Compaore has been able to sense fully the degree of determination of the Togolese political leaders. That is why we reiterate the appeal he made to Togo's partners to provide the support necessary for the economic revitalization of Togo.

The crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is at a decisive turning point. We are convinced that with the firm and sincere commitment of all parties and the support of the international community a lasting solution can be found very quickly.

In the Middle East, we have watched a disturbing escalation in the violence in recent months. Since the causes of that conflict are sufficiently known to all, there is no reason to go into them here. While welcoming the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and the deployment of an expanded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Burkina Faso strongly hopes that negotiations will continue and intensify at all levels in order to achieve a global and lasting peace in that region, a peace that will restore the sovereignty of Lebanon, provide freedom for the Palestinian people and ensure Israel's security.

The question of free and fair international trade remains on the table. The collapse of the Doha Development Round is proof of this, and it has shown us the need to search for the best way to ensure that the rules of the multilateral trading system set by the World Trade Organization are strictly observed. For Burkina Faso, which has thrown its full weight behind the interests of African cotton producers, this requirement is more imperative than ever. Sustainable development, the reduction of poverty and the elimination of hunger and precariousness in the world still constitute challenges that must be faced.

Over and above what has been done to reduce debt and find innovative financing mechanisms, which we welcome, the international community must work to forge a true North-South partnership that will guarantee fair treatment of the questions of concern to all the regions and countries in the world. The midterm review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, held several days ago, and its conclusions suggest that we are moving in the right direction.

The sheer scale of international migration in recent years, together with the daily tragedies experienced by thousands of young people who risk their lives, presents a new challenge caused by accelerated globalization. To deal with the problem, the countries of origin, transit and destination must find more imaginative solutions that go to its root causes, as neither barriers, nor borders, nor interdiction, nor forced repatriation can be an adequate, much less a sustainable, response. That is why we welcome the results of the Euro-Africa Conference on Migration and Development, held on 10 and 11 July 2006 in Rabat, the initiatives taken by the African Union to prepare a joint African policy on migration and the

conclusions of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held recently in New York at the margins of the current session.

The unprecedented rise in the price of a barrel of oil and the resulting energy crisis have hit our countries hard. The economies of African countries that do not export oil, such as Burkina Faso, will take a long time to recover. This crisis means that we must find not only innovative forms of international solidarity but also alternatives to fossil fuels. With this reality in mind, Burkina Faso has already decided to make the development of biogas from the waste of plant crops, such as cotton, one of its priorities.

The question of nuclear energy has been on the agenda of most of our meetings for some time. Burkina Faso reiterates its firm condemnation of the arms race in general and the proliferation of nuclear weapons in particular. It is now imperative that we give full force to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. However, we must do so without prejudice to the rights of all States to develop, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

In the name of democracy and justice, we have all sought to create a new United Nations, a symbol of modern governance and efficiency in its management of world affairs. That is why we have undertaken to ensure deep-rooted reform of the Organization and its working methods. Africa in particular is dedicated to that cause because we are convinced that it is the only way to put right an unjustice that has festered over decades.

Change was launched with the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Central Emergency Response Fund, the conversion of the Commission on Human Rights into the Human Rights Council, and the adoption of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We must now all work together to ensure that multilateralism and universalism triumph over unilateralism. To that end, we need a strong and democratic United Nations that is open to all peoples who seek peace and justice.

That spirit of openness and universalization in the Organization must be a component of a genuine and irreversible democratic movement. That is why we must do justice by the 23 million Taiwanese whose only aspiration has always been to play an active role in our common endeavour to build a better world.

In that respect, Burkina Faso is very pleased to welcome Montenegro as the 192nd Member of the United Nations.

On behalf of my country, Burkina Faso, I wish now to pay special tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who, with commitment, tact, selflessness and unprecedented efficiency has breathed new dynamism into the Organization over the past 10 years and rejuvenated the founding elements of the new United Nations that we have dreamed of for decades. As he prepares to move on from this important chapter in his life, we wish him every success in his future activities.

The aspirations of our peoples are vast. Just as we must strive to optimize governance globally, we must also work to entrench local governance, democracy and freedom. That is the only way we will be able to satisfy those legitimate aspirations and to bequeath to future generations a world of peace that is reconciled to itself.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kassymzhomart Tokaev, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Tokaev (Kazakhstan): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your election to your high office and express confidence that, under your skilful stewardship, the sixty-first session of the General Assembly will be successful and fruitful.

Last year's World Summit reaffirmed the role of the United Nations as an indispensable and universal forum for taking important action on today's burning issues. The Summit's decision to carry out United Nations reform, the most radical in its history, is a case in point. We are now in a position to give a preliminary assessment of the work in that area. The results, unfortunately, are mixed.

On the one hand, helpful decisions have been taken to establish new elective bodies within the United Nations system — the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council. They were set up thanks to the intensive efforts of all delegations, which were able to reach a compromise through negotiations. On the other hand, the lack of any progress on the issue of reforming the work of the General Assembly and the Security Council is seriously impeding the institutional reform of the Organization. In our view, further delays in that process might have a negative impact on the United

Nations efforts in the areas of international stability, security and development.

For the delegation of Kazakhstan, the current session is, in a way, an anniversary session. We are taking part in the work of this forum for the fifteenth time. While consistently advancing its national interests in the international arena, my country is firmly committed to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

The establishment in Asia of a mechanism of cooperation to enhance regional security and stability, known as the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA), was one of Kazakhstan's first initiatives, put forward from this rostrum in 1992. We can safely claim that the initiative has proved its viability and has become an important factor of international relations at this juncture, as evidenced by the outcome of the second CICA Summit, held in Kazakhstan last June. The documents adopted by CICA, such as the Catalogue of Confidence-building Measures and the Agreement on the Establishment of the CICA Secretariat, have created propitious conditions for regional cooperation and multilateral dialogue in Asia.

Kazakhstan has consistently called for an enhanced nuclear-weapons non-proliferation regime. That position is rooted in the sufferings of our people, who are still reeling from the negative effects of nuclear explosions at the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground, shut down exactly 15 years ago by decree of President Nursultan Nazarbayev. The position was bolstered by the historic decision of my country to voluntarily renounce its nuclear arsenal, which used to be the fourth largest in the world.

We want that step to serve as a commendable example in the light of the ongoing large-scale crisis that has struck the global security system. Regrettably, the lack of any result at the last Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the United Nations Disarmament Commission remains a major challenge for the international community.

It is time to make coordinated efforts to overcome that crisis. The process to that end has already made a good start. The Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia, signed on 8 September in Semipalatinsk, is a demonstration of the political will of five Central Asian States: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The signing of that milestone instrument could become a catalyst for the process of enhancing the NPT. We believe that tangible progress in that area is possible if all Member States comply with their obligations regarding nuclear disarmament and the vertical and horizontal proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Central Asian States are ready to continue consultations with the permanent members of the Security Council on the issue of that Treaty's entry into force.

In our view, the States concerned should strictly comply with their commitment to a moratorium on nuclear test explosions and work to ensure the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. All peaceful nuclear programmes should be carried out in a transparent manner under the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

It is a matter of great concern that the crisis has extended not only to strategic, but also to conventional weapons. Regrettably, Member States have so far failed to devise common approaches to the Programme of Action in that area. We have to step up efforts to tighten national export-control mechanisms. I refer first and foremost to dual-use materials and technologies, as well as to missiles and the means of delivery of weapons of mass destruction, with full and strict compliance with the provisions of the Security Council resolution adopted in 2004.

The possibility of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists is a matter of grave concern. To prevent such a scenario, we have to push for the accession of all United Nations Member States to the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.

We live in a world where tensions between States and armed conflicts are still very much a part of everyday life. The crisis in Lebanon has highlighted yet again the need to use effectively the United Nations capacity to maintain international peace and security. Since the early days of the conflict, Kazakhstan has called for the strengthening of the Security Council's role in the settlement of that crisis.

The deployment of a strengthened contingent of United Nations peacekeepers in the conflict zone was the only viable solution to that large-scale crisis. Regrettably, the lack of an effective mechanism to prevent the break-up and spread of armed conflicts

remains a serious problem. In our view, the establishment of a United Nations preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention centre in Central Asia remains a relevant proposition. That Centre would focus on the provision of advice and expertise to the countries of the region, taking into account their national interests and security considerations.

It is vitally important to identify how the belated adoption of the Security Council resolution on Lebanon is consistent with the process of United Nations reform. The inefficiency of the institutional system of the United Nations and the lack of broad understanding among Member States negatively affect global and regional stability and security.

Kazakhstan has decided to run for a seat on the Economic and Social Council. We express our appreciation to those Member States that have supported our nomination. If elected, we intend actively to participate in the work of that important United Nations organ on all substantive items on its agenda.

Speaking from this high rostrum, I feel obliged to express serious concern about the resurgence of international terrorism. Recent explosions in Iraq and Turkey and the aborted London terror plot indicate that this global threat is clearly growing. It is impossible to counter the threat without consolidated efforts on the part of the entire international community to speed up the implementation of relevant counter-terrorism conventions and Security Council resolutions. We have to strengthen cooperation between Member States at the United Nations. The early conclusion of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism is very much on our agenda.

With illegal routes for the delivery of Afghan drugs from Asia to Europe running through its territory, Kazakhstan makes every effort to address that threat, yet it is clear that no country in the world can address it effectively on its own. The fight will be effective only if we join our efforts and mobilize the resources of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. It is precisely for that reason that Kazakhstan has supported the United Nations initiative to set up in Kazakhstan a Central Asian regional information and coordination centre to fight illegal drug trafficking.

We welcome the results of the General Assembly's High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. We believe that those discussions have helped to lay the groundwork for a regular dialogue on that issue among all parties concerned. As a country of destination, transit and origin for migration, Kazakhstan is willing to take an active part in the search for solutions to the problems of illegal migration, labour migration and the protection of the rights of migrants.

In our view, development issues should remain the focus of attention of the international community. The timely and effective achievement of the Millennium Development Goals will grow in importance as we approach 2015. Kazakhstan supports decisions on development issues taken at major international conferences and United Nations summits, and calls for their timely and effective implementation.

As the largest landlocked country, Kazakhstan urges the international community — above all the developed countries — to make every effort to meet the needs of the least developed and developing landlocked countries.

The structural reforms carried out since its independence have totally transformed Kazakhstan. Today, it is one of the most dynamic States of the world and has set ambitious goals to promote further development. The average growth of our gross domestic product over the past five years is 10 per cent. The World Bank has included Kazakhstan in the top 20 most attractive economies for investment. The Government works to ensure that Kazakhstan will join the ranks of the most competitive economies. To reach that target, we have developed an innovative industrial economic development programme and finance relevant projects through a special national fund. All the basic development institutions have been established. Negotiations on Kazakhstan's admission to the World Trade Organization are in their final stages. Programmes are being implemented to use the transport and transit capacity of the country, and large-scale projects are being carried out to integrate the country's transportation infrastructure into the Eurasian transportation system.

Kazakhstan renews its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations Development Programme report issued on the eve of the 2005 World Summit demonstrates that our country has made great strides in that area.

As a major exporter of energy resources, Kazakhstan will continue to pursue its policy to ensure

their delivery to world markets through multiple routes. With the growing economy, the Government is consistently increasing social spending, primarily in health care, education, employment and other areas. Our efforts have made it possible for the World Bank to rank Kazakhstan as a successful State with a dynamically growing economy.

We pay close attention to the promotion of democracy, the building of civil society and the enhancement of inter-ethnic and inter-faith accord within the country. Our accomplishments are evident. My country, home to more than 100 ethnic groups and practically all religions, is a model of tolerance, accord and stability.

It is no accident that Kazakhstan has hosted a forum of leaders of world and traditional religions. The second congress has just completed its deliberations in Astana, at which religious leaders adopted a declaration calling for an active dialogue among religions. We cannot allow the use of religious differences as an instrument of hatred and strife, and we have to save humanity from a global clash of religions and cultures. The congress has become Kazakhstan's contribution to global dialogue among religions.

Kazakhstan carries out a balanced foreign policy based on our long-term national interests and aimed at the development of friendly ties with neighbouring countries and all interested countries of the world.

As the current Chair of the Commonwealth of Independent States, my country has devised a plan to reform that organization in order to enhance its capacity. Kazakhstan has been working actively in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Community and supports the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Ahead of the other post-Soviet countries in many areas, Kazakhstan has always assumed responsibility for the implementation of international initiatives, whether it be the decision to shut down the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground, or to voluntarily renounce nuclear weapons, or its initiatives to convene a regional security forum in Asia, or to hold a congress of leaders of world and traditional religions or to host the first global conference on transit-transport cooperation or to host a special meeting of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee. In 2007, Kazakhstan will host the sixty-third session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

We express our appreciation to all States that have supported Kazakhstan's candidature for the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2009. Kazakhstan will continue to be active on all key items of the global agenda.

In conclusion, I would like to quote a popular saying in my country: "Nothing can be farther than yesterday and nothing can be closer than tomorrow". A year ago, at the World Summit, we agreed to take action to reform the United Nations. We should not forget that humanity pins its hopes for a better future on the United Nations as an indispensable Organization. It is high time to take specific and effective action to raise the prestige of our Organization.

The President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmad Allam-mi, Minister for Foreign Affairs and African Integration of Chad.

Mr. Allam-mi (Chad) (*spoke in French*): First and foremost, Madam President, on behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, permit me to convey to you our heartfelt congratulations on your outstanding election to the presidency of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. We are certain that due to your qualities, talent and experience, you will lead us satisfactorily in our work. Our congratulations are also directed to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson and his team, whose dedication and fervour have enabled us to accomplish an enormous amount of work that has been appreciated by all and was carried out within an especially troubling international context.

In addition, we would like to pay a well-deserved tribute to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of our Organization, whose extremely important role in promoting the implementation of our ideals will be engraved in the annals of our Organization.

We have unceasingly, before this same Assembly, condemned all forms of violence and intolerance, especially in its most terrible manifestation that has been most visible in our time — terrorism. We have committed ourselves to respect the United Nations Charter, which was created precisely to save

succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to maintain international peace and security.

Our responsibility requires that we work together in order to eliminate the major scourges that threaten humanity. With regard to fighting terrorism, I reiterate that my country has signed and ratified most of the international instruments pertaining to that scourge, and that it is cooperating with different countries and relevant United Nations institutions in order to continue that fight. Furthermore, along with terrorism, the past year has seen alarming situations in many young States that are victims of war and serious armed conflicts, taking place throughout the world, and that cause instability and challenge the efforts made by those States to establish democratic institutions and foster socio-economic progress for their peoples.

As far as my country is concerned, despite attempts to destabilize and anti-constitutional seizures of power — problems that it continues to experience — we organized free and transparent presidential elections for 3 May 2006, in which the Chadian people renewed their confidence in His Excellency President Idriss Deby Itno. Subsequently, a political dialogue took place from 28 July to 2 August 2006 in N'Djamena. There, 54 out of the 78 legally recognized political parties took part in that important forum, whose conclusions will, undoubtedly, lay the foundation for the consolidation of the rule of law and the strengthening of the democratic process in our country.

It would be an illusion to think that my country will enjoy the necessary stability, without difficulties, needed to consolidate the democratic rule of law, if it continues to suffer the pernicious effects of the Darfur crisis. We have just normalized our relations with the Sudan, after we had been compelled to break off diplomatic relations because of the subversive plotting against us in connection with Darfur. We hope to renew the bonds of friendship and good neighbourliness with that fraternal country that we have had in the past.

Nevertheless, we continue to be concerned about the Darfur crisis, which threatens not just our security, but also that of the entire subregion. The Darfur conflict has caused enormous harm to Chad and the Chadian people since it began in 2003, including a lack of security, economic loss and environmental destruction. Incursions of the Janjaweed into Chadian territory brought the fighting in Darfur into the eastern part of Chad, resulting in the displacement of more than 50,000 Chadians, the deaths of hundreds and the plundering of thousands of heads of livestock, among other problems.

Chad was the first country to receive and assist refugees from Darfur — more than 300,000 — before the international community intervened. In addition to those refugees, we have an increasing number of Central African refugees. Central Africa is, after Chad, the next biggest victim of the Darfur crisis, which risks spreading — if we are not careful — throughout the entire subregion of Central Africa.

In that connection, we welcome the extension to the end of December 2006 of the African Union mission in Darfur. It is better than nothing. Nevertheless, faced with the difficulties of the Government of the Sudan and the African Union in containing the crisis, we reaffirm our position that is well known and not new. The United Nations must take over from the African Union, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1706 (2006). We say that in friendship with our Sudanese brothers, while respecting their sovereignty. Our position should in no way be construed as hostile to the fraternal Government of the Sudan. It has nothing to do with what some are calling an international conspiracy against the Sudan. It is based simply on common sense and is aimed at providing assistance to the innocent victims of the war. Furthermore, Chad has more to gain than any other country from the restoration of peace to Darfur, if only because that would enable the hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees located on our territory to return to their country and thus put an end to the sacrifices being made by the Chadian host population.

Furthermore, we are finding it difficult to ensure the security of the refugee camps, which, as they are open and located not very far from the border, are used by some Sudanese rebels as safe havens, resupply stations and recruiting grounds. That is why we had hoped that international forces would be sent to the eastern part of the country to help us to secure the refugee camps and guarantee their neutrality, as well as to ensure the security of the common border and to prevent the crisis in Darfur from spilling over.

At this time of rapid globalization, which many thought would be inclusive and beneficial, the gap between rich and poor countries is growing. Despite the efforts being made by our States — which are

weakened and subjected to abusive constraints by international institutions and other partners — the integration of our economies within the globalization process aimed at achieving harmonious and sustainable development still seems remote, while the current rules and regulations of the market economy undermine the competitiveness of our economies. How can our beset countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals given our ongoing lack of income, the heavy debt burden and the scourges of HIV/AIDS and malaria?

My country had a disagreement with the World Bank following our revision of Law 001 pertaining to oil revenues. We are therefore pleased with the fruitful dialogue that we have had with the Bank, which has led to a mutually acceptable compromise and to the resumption of our cooperation with that great institution.

In the same vein, with regard to the defence of our interests so that our people can benefit from the natural resources of our country, it should be pointed out to the international community that there has been a recent deterioration in our relationship with two members of the oil consortium that is active in our country because they have refused to pay a profits tax to the Chadian authorities. Furthermore, we have expressed the outrage of the people of Chad at the fact that they benefit from only 12.5 per cent of the fees associated with the exploitation of their oil resources. We have denounced the fact that three years of the sale of our oil yielded us only $588 million, while the oil companies amassed $5 billion. We ask that justice be done. Indeed, we demand our legitimate right to participate directly in the production and marketing of our resources. If we cannot, the sovereign rights of our country will be trampled underfoot, its objective of poverty reduction will come to naught and our dream of economic and social progress will remain an illusion.

Beyond our own problems, we are concerned about conflict situations elsewhere on the continent and in other parts of the world. We welcome the efforts made within the African Union and the United Nations to find lasting solutions, and we express our readiness to provide assistance to the extent possible.

For example, we believe that the national reconciliation process in Côte d'Ivoire is on the right track, although some minor problems have been encountered. We note that both the African Union and the United Nations are playing a major role there. All Ivorian political stakeholders must acknowledge the pain and suffering of the people and understand that there are limits to the patience of the members of international community. They must make a determined effort to put an end to the conflict — a conflict that has had grave consequences for the stability of the subregion.

In the Middle East, including Palestine, we were appalled and outraged by the recent events that took place in southern Lebanon, resulting in the massive destruction of the infrastructure of the country and the loss of life among civilians. We hope that the provisions of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) will be respected with a view to a favourable outcome.

We also remain concerned about the continuing deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. We call on the international community to involve itself more fully in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has for too long been a source of instability in that region.

Anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance are a legacy of armed conflict, and my country continues to pay a high price for armed conflicts and other wars conducted on its territory. As a State party to the Ottawa Convention, it is in the process of destroying them in cooperation with friendly countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their ongoing support. I request those friendly countries and institutions to continue to provide assistance so that the programme to combat those deadly devices can be strengthened.

The structures of our Organization are neither fair nor democratic. In this regard, my country continues to align itself with the African position with regard to the restructuring of the United Nations, including the expansion of the Security Council, with a view to ensuring equitable representation for all regions of the world. The reforms undertaken in the past year, especially in the framework of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions of the 2005 Summit, have the unswerving support of my country, which is looking forward with interest to the outcome of the various consultations currently under way.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Mr. Ungureanu (Romania): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Madam, on your election as President of the General Assembly. The Romanian delegation looks forward to a presidency which brings to the world Organization excellent diplomatic skills, while increasing our confidence in the prospects for more balanced gender representation at the top. I would also like to pay tribute to Ambassador Jan Eliasson, President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, for his outstanding performance and for his commitment to the reform of the United Nations.

Romania subscribes to the statement made by the President of Finland on behalf of the European Union, and fully shares the views expressed therein. I would like, in addition, to give a frank account of my country's keen and active interest in a strong and effective United Nations.

Let me say, in all modesty, that we strive hard to practice what we preach. Romania has had to make up for 16 years of lost time — decades of ideological pandemics, economic mismanagement, lack of respect for human rights and lack of democracy. I would like to express the gratitude of my Government for the continuing support that the United Nations has extended during our transition in many helpful ways, including the valuable work of its country team in Romania.

We have come a long way to now be in a position to join the European Union, which is profoundly rooted in the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. We have worked hard, that is true, and we have had very good friends all along to help us prevail. I am therefore proud to say that the United Nations has been, and still is, foremost among those friends.

Let me quote a recent statement by the Secretary-General:

> "Our success in advancing the agenda will depend on great part on forging coalitions for change involving Government representative, civil society, the private sector, philanthropic foundations, academic institutions and all others with contributions to make. I know that Romania is strongly committed to this path of partnership and has been working actively to cement constructive ties with the United Nations and with its neighbours throughout Europe as the country moves towards formal accession to the European Union."

I myself could not have put it better if I had wished to characterize in a nutshell our genuine commitment to effective multilateralism and to better management of the rapid and multifaceted changes brought about by the globalization process. That is why Romania understands, and wishes to be an active participant in, the current reform process, pursuant to the guidelines we accepted as set out in the Millennium Summit Outcome.

We have made significant steps ahead as far as institutional reform is concerned. We agreed to change the Human Rights Commission, a body whose historical mission had been accomplished. We created a new Human Rights Council to help the United Nations make a fresh start in the implementation of the impressive corpus of international human rights instruments built since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But let us not indulge in complacency. If we do not fill this new box with the expected contents, our intention to reform will remain unfulfilled.

The Human Rights Council should spare no effort in order to do what it is meant to do: uphold, in the daily work of Governments across all continents and legal systems, the priority goal of ensuring that human rights are widely and deeply known and observed. We should not see the primary duty of the international community to monitor the implementation of human rights law, be it by a universal peer review or by the expert work of the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, as unfriendly gestures towards our Governments.

We are deeply honoured by the exceptional opportunity we have as members of the first Human Rights Council to contribute to the reform of the United Nations human rights machinery. We have already come up with a number of proposals aimed at streamlining the work of the new Council and at upholding its authority. We need to make greater efforts to make human rights a fundamental pillar of the United Nations, on an equal footing with security and development, by will of its Charter.

There is a similar need with respect to the Peacebuilding Commission. The history of the United Nations involves the continuing trend of creating new bodies to address new problems. That can be a virtue if such bodies have a strong mandate and sufficient resources to meet expectations. But it can also be a sin if all we do is generate additional meetings and documents without consequence. The Peacebuilding Commission is a remarkable institutional and legal innovation. Let us introduce new thinking and resources, rather than old habits, into this framework.

Considerable efforts have been deployed since 1993 to reform the Security Council. Romania is ready to embark on a meaningful and pragmatic consideration of the question of increasing the membership of the Security Council while preserving its effectiveness and credibility. We are aware of the difficulties inherent in further Council expansion. Recent debates have shown that all Member States should benefit to certain extent from the reform of the most powerful body in the United Nations system. An obvious case in point is the Eastern European Group, which expects to receive its fair share in the eventual outcome of negotiations on this matter.

The issue of the revitalization of the General Assembly is also on our agenda. The intensive efforts made to expand the Security Council should not obscure the need to genuinely reform the most representative organ of the United Nations — namely the General Assembly. There are many ways to do much more within existing structures and available resources in terms of time and money. We can make simple reforms. We may choose to streamline the agenda by confining it to essential and topical issues, avoiding the annual repetition of texts which bring no true added value, and using less rhetoric and more pragmatism as the main thread of our decisions.

The General Assembly can also do more in its role of supporting democratization processes in various countries. We know how shy the drafters of the Charter were about the use of the idea of democracy. During the cold war, the concept of democracy was merely totemic at the United Nations. However, times have changed for the better. I genuinely believe that the United Nations has made considerable, if not truly spectacular, progress in that area.

My country is proud to have been an active player in two international movements whose fundamental task is to promote democracy: the New or Restored Democracies process and the Community of Democracies. We have taken dedicated action under the auspices of both. Romania initiated a series of five resolutions on different aspects of democracy-building that have been adopted since the year 2000 by both the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly.

There is no reason why the United Nations would slow down this process. On the contrary, we take this opportunity to encourage both the sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, to be held in Qatar, and the third Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies, to be held in Mali, to dare to do more. The time has come for us to adopt a universal declaration on democracy, a code of democratic conduct or even an international covenant on the right to democracy. Democracy works, despite difficulties and temporary setbacks.

Let me add that, if we have doubts about our duty, we should ask our nations if they want to have a choice, in a multiparty system, and to make full use of fair elections, as opposed to not participating or having to accede violently to power? Do they want to be governed by dictators who work for themselves or by Governments that work for the governed? We all may find the answer to these queries quite obvious.

In our deliberations about reform, one of the questions that arose was how to undertake constitutional reform and bring the Charter more in line with the new challenges of our time. There is much to be done here, in spite of our understandable reluctance to reopen the sacred book. At the same time, we could adequately make the most out of the existing legal framework.

We believe that Chapter VIII of the Charter is a generous framework for increased and more efficient cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations. During its tenure as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, my country, Romania, initiated a rewarding debate on this topic, which led to the adoption of resolution 1631 (2005). We welcome the report of the Secretary-General entitled "A regional-global security partnership: challenges and opportunities". The report is a very valuable contribution to the clarification of the possible distribution of roles based on the competitive advantages of regional organizations. I therefore

support the recommendations made by the Secretary-General aimed at passing from an "adhocracy" to the gradual institutionalization of the operational mechanisms of an enhanced cooperation.

In this field, Romania practices what it preaches. The proof lies in its determination to pursue regional cooperation processes in Central and South-Eastern Europe, in various fields: the South-Eastern European Cooperation Process, the Central European Initiative, the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and so on. The stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region is the main priority of our foreign policy at the regional level. We are pursuing a new cooperation paradigm that is expected to produce deliverable results. Romania is satisfied at having promoted, during its chairmanship of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, two very important initiatives: a Black Sea Euro-region, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, and a Forum for Dialogue and Partnership.

We are a conscientious and responsible member of the international community and ready to assume our duties. The constant and robust economic growth of recent years has now enabled my country to consider acting as a donor, helping developing countries in their long-standing pursuit of economic prosperity. My Government has already taken measures to define a legal framework for the financing of official development assistance.

Europe has peace on its borders. But that is only half true if we take into consideration the continued existence of frozen conflicts that seem to escape the active attention of the United Nations. We are shirking our duty if we turn a deaf ear to the unresolved conflicts whose roots date back to the Soviet era. Those conflicts affect small States that are working hard to consolidate their independence, their institutions and their economies. They need the assistance of the United Nations and protection under international law.

One of the most striking examples is the situation in Transdniestria, a separatist area of our neighbouring country the Republic of Moldova. The lawless regime there must not be allowed to become permanent. Supported by heavily armed troops, that regime is involved in smuggling and illegal trafficking and is disrespectful of human rights; it is also ready to seize schools *manu militari*. Relying on its weapons and ammunition, the regime threatens its neighbours and the legitimate Government of the Republic of Moldova and cynically mocks democracy through unlawful referendums.

The United Nations must apply the provisions of the Charter to put an end to the dark ages in Transdniestria. What is needed is genuine will on the part of all relevant actors — be they international organizations or neighbouring countries. We also believe that it is our duty to assist the courageous efforts of Georgia to build a democratic society and to regain full territorial integrity. There is hope. The recent adoption by the General Assembly of a decision to include on its agenda a new item on protracted conflicts — which Romania has fully supported — augurs well for a new attitude.

Seven years after the United Nations took responsibility for the future of Kosovo, that province symbolizes the difficult legacy that the Western Balkans is struggling to overcome. We support the efforts of Martti Ahtisaari, Special Envoy for the future status process for Kosovo, and of the Contact Group. Both sides directly concerned should show greater flexibility in order to find a lasting and mutually accepted solution. In that regard, the United Nations role remains extremely important until the future status of the province is decided.

Our interest in achieving peace, stability and prosperity is not confined to our own region. Romania is trying hard to make significant contributions to the maintenance of peace throughout the world. Romanian military, police and civilian personnel are present in the United Nations peacekeeping operations deployed in Afghanistan, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Haiti and the Sudan. Together with other peace-loving nations, we also contribute troops to other major peace operations, including those in Afghanistan, Iraq and Bosnia. Nearly 1,500 Romanian troops, civilian police, military observers, staff officers and support personnel are deployed in those areas.

At the same time, we believe that more efforts are needed to find lasting political solutions to existing conflicts and tensions. Afghanistan has come a long way towards becoming a stable State, free from terrorism and the Taliban. However, many challenges still lie ahead. Winning the peace in Afghanistan requires even more enhanced and coordinated efforts

by the international community — especially to fight insurgents, to train the Afghan army and police and to accelerate quick-impact reconstruction projects.

Romania firmly supports the Government of Iraq in its efforts to create an efficient and responsible administration. Strong international support is needed if the Iraqi people are to succeed in achieving lasting stability and in going back to work for the country's prosperity. Technical and financial support is also badly needed. It is essential not to weaken the international presence in Iraq, without which the progress made thus far would be put at risk.

We take note with satisfaction of the latest developments in Lebanon, particularly the progress made in deploying an expanded United Nations force in the area. We believe that we are witnessing a historic breakthrough in a long-standing conflict. We are confident that the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and of the future mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon will build hope and trust for a lasting political solution to the Middle East conflict.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has emerged as a major threat to global security and international stability. We should never underestimate the chances that such weapons will be used in terrorist activities. We support new international efforts to strengthen the existing international regimes, to ensure the full and unconditional implementation of obligations undertaken by the States parties and to promote the universalization of multilateral treaties and agreements in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

At the same time, we must continue to fight terrorism, individually and collectively, in order to eliminate it as a threat to the lives of innocent people and to the daily life of our societies. If it is to succeed, the international community must correctly identify and overcome the factors that contribute to terrorism. Romania is firmly engaged in the fight against terrorist threats through its participation in the efforts of the international community and in those undertaken by regional and subregional organizations.

(*spoke in French*)

Romania will soon have the honour to host the eleventh summit of la Francophonie. This conference of heads of State and Government of countries using French as a common language will take place on 28 and 29 September 2006 in Bucharest. La Francophonie definitely does more than promote multilingualism. At the previous summit, la Francophonie acted as a faithful partner by adopting a strategic framework aligned with the Millennium Goals and the objectives of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held at Johannesburg. That framework is fully in keeping with the fight against poverty and the efforts to promote sustainable development. It is based on a consensus that emphasizes human rights, good governance and democracy, as well as conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This year, the summit will have the theme "Information technologies in education". That is another complementary area on which la Francophonie intends to focus in order to contribute to the objectives agreed at the World Summit on the Information Society. I hope that during the present session of the General Assembly, Romania will be able to report further actions taken by la Francophonie in keeping with United Nations objectives.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Alikbek Djekshenkulov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Djekshenkulov (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): For more than a year now, Kyrgyzstan has been experiencing a new stage in its historical development. Today, our leaders are doing their utmost to further strengthen our country's democratic and market reforms. The unswerving policy we have adopted in order to build a democratic society based on laws and a well-developed national economy will lay a solid foundation for a stable political situation. We have committed ourselves to ensuring all the conditions necessary for the sustainable development of Kyrgyzstan's economy and the enhancement of our people's well-being.

At the 2005 World Summit, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Mr. Kurmanbek Bakiev, reaffirmed our full commitment to the universal goals and targets set out in the Millennium Declaration. All the necessary legislative measures have been adopted in our country to protect social well-being and to support the most vulnerable sectors of the population. That will help significantly to reduce our poverty level.

In 2005 alone, despite the existing difficulties, social expenditures constituted more than 43 per cent

of the Republic's budget. As a result, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General on the integration of countries with economies in transition into the world economy, Kyrgyzstan has reduced the scale of poverty in the country.

I would also like to point out that the situation today in the Kyrgyz Republic is characterized by openness in the economy, macro-economic stability, a liberal currency and visa regime, and the free movement of capital and labour. We also enjoy the advantages of membership in the World Trade Organization.

As I have already pointed out, my country has repeatedly and actively shown its commitment to its international obligations in the area of the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. Today, the Kyrgyz Republic adheres to all the basic universal international instruments with a human dimension and continues to carry out those provisions responsibly. Further democratization of the society and the encouragement of human rights remain the priorities for our domestic policy. This is why our Head of State has initiated reform in law enforcement and judicial bodies, as well as constitutional reform in order to improve the balance of power. I would like to point out, in particular, that a very active role is being played by political parties and civil society in this process, thereby ensuring the genuine involvement of broad masses of the population in the adoption of important State decisions.

A month ago, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights decided to establish a Regional Office in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic. We regard this move as indicating a strong recognition of our efforts towards strengthening democratic principles and encouraging human rights and freedom of speech in the country.

The Kyrgyz Republic has ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption and has devised a State strategy to combat this scourge. It has established a national agency to combat corruption and a financial intelligence service. I am certain that in our country, where effective governance is being practiced and where human rights are being observed, there will be a better chance of avoiding conflict and overcoming obstacles to development. It is no secret that, at this difficult time in human development, with its increasing global, regional and civilizational problems, we all feel the presence of moral and psychological malaise in many parts of the world.

In order to attain harmony on our planet, all of us need to humanize our societies and give pride of place to moral and spiritual values. As our forebears have said, when people unite in spirit, they can move mountains. Today, we are all witnessing global change. There are new issues, new tasks that require innovative approaches to solve them. In this regard, the Kyrgyz Republic proposes the formulation of yet another Millennium Goal — goal 9 — which should focus on dynamic development of the local community. Success could be guaranteed through improving the system of governance, democratization of local self-governance, the elimination of corruption and the involvement in governance of representatives of various social and ethnic groups. We base this on the principle that a strong local community means a stable State. A stable State means a stable region. And a stable region means a secure world.

It is well known that security and development are indivisible. We cannot ensure development, if we do not ensure security. We will not achieve global security unless we support development and eliminate poverty. As the Millennium Project report has pointed out, there are many factors underlying extreme poverty, first and foremost being that of an unfavourable geographical situation.

In this connection, I would like to devote special attention to mountainous areas, which are our planet's basic source of drinking water. We are grateful for the support of the United Nations Member States in adopting General Assembly resolution 60/198 on sustainable mountain development at the Assembly's sixtieth session. I am certain that this will enable mountain countries to take serious steps towards solving social, economic and environmental problems.

Pursuant to the decisions of the Bishkek Mountain Platform, which was adopted in 2002 at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, we propose that a second mountain summit be convened in 2007, with a view to taking stock of the international community's activities relating to sustainable mountain development over the past five years. This initiative has already received support from the United Nations Development Programme Administrator, Kemal Dervish, and the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, who proposed that we call the second summit "Bishkek

Plus Five". I would like to take this opportunity to invite all States to take part in this important international forum. We hope the international community will support our initiative.

Commitment to a policy of disarmament and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction is one of the major fundamental principles of the foreign policy of the peace-loving Kyrgyz Republic. Proof of this policy was the signing on 8 September 2006 in Kazakhstan of an agreement on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. We regard this as a joint contribution of the States of the region to global security and to freeing humankind from the threat of lethal weapons. At present, non-nuclear zones are becoming an important element in multilateral mechanisms to counter nuclear terrorism. The issue is more timely than ever, bearing in mind the existing threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist organizations.

In this connection, from this lofty rostrum of the Assembly Hall, I would like to appeal to United Nations Member States to support the draft resolution on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, which will be put forward at the current session of the Assembly's First Committee. One of the distinguishing features of our nuclear-free zone is its environmental aspect. States in the region have suffered more than most from the negative impact of nuclear programmes and testing. Human radiation, radiation of our territory and the dangers posed by uranium tailings are proof of this.

Existing regional environmental problems are being worsened by global warming, drought and soil degradation. This year the Kyrgyz Republic chairs the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. The problem of the Aral Sea has today taken on the scope of a global environmental disaster that, to various extents, has influenced natural processes throughout the world. In this connection, we call upon the international community to consolidate efforts for the implementation of programmes and projects to save the Aral Sea.

I would like to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the work of the Organization (document A/61/1). With his usual leadership skills, he has clearly set forth in the report the activities of the Organization during 2005. We fully share his view that globalization has become one of the predominant factors of the last decade. We must see to it that the United Nations strengthens its positive aspects. With the active participation of our Organization, globalization must become an instrument to ensure sustainable development and reduce the gap between rich and poor, overcome discrimination in economic relations and enhance the well-being of our peoples.

Unfortunately, along with globalization there has been an increase in the spread of such threats and challenges as international crime, the illicit trade in drugs and weapons, epidemic disease and environmental degradation. The Government of Kyrgyzstan has been taking decisive steps to combat these negative phenomena. They are especially felt in our region, bearing in mind the difficult situation in Afghanistan.

I am convinced that effectively countering these threats is possible only on the basis of a worldwide expansion of regional and international cooperation, involving organizations that have the necessary capacities and that are successfully operating to that end at the present time. In this respect, the Kyrgyz Republic is taking an active part in the work of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Today, as President of SCO, Kyrgyzstan will do its utmost to strengthen it further as a reliable guarantor of security and stability in the region.

Speaking last year from this high rostrum, President Kurmanbek Bakiev of the Kyrgyz Republic stated that the sixtieth session of the General Assembly must be remembered as one of reform. Today, we can assert that the 60th anniversary session was indeed one of reform. We established the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council and created the Central Emergency Response Fund. We reformed the Secretariat and adopted a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

And yet, a number of key tasks remain to be carried out. The Kyrgyz Republic agrees that there is a need to step up the activities of the General Assembly and to strengthen the role of the Economic and Social Council in attaining critical development goals.

United Nations reform will not be complete without Security Council reform. We advocate enhanced efforts to seek solutions in the interests of all members of the international community. Kyrgyzstan

joins in the appeal of Member States to expand permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council, which would reflect the realities of our times and promote the effectiveness of our work.

We believe that if the United Nations activities are to be consistent and effective, we must keep up with the times and adapt to events as they take place in the course of human development. The United Nations must be oriented towards achieving concrete results and meeting the pressing needs of the peoples of our planet.

The President: I now give the floor to His Royal Highness Prince Mohamed Bolkiah, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam.

Prince Mohamed Bolkiah (Brunei Darussalam): I extend my congratulations on your election, Madam, and my respects to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Bahrain. I assure you of Brunei Darussalam's full support in the coming year and wish you great success during your term of office.

I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his excellent leadership of the Assembly over the past year.

Finally, may I express my special appreciation to our Secretary-General. For many years, he has been the United Nations most public figure. That has never been easy, but he has served us with great distinction. His programmes of action have strengthened our voice. His personal leadership has inspired us, and I thank him most warmly for that.

During the past few years, we have regularly discussed United Nations reform, and I am sure that discussions will continue in the coming years. Therefore, at the opening of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, I would like to take this opportunity to mention a few of our own feelings in Brunei Darussalam about the question of United Nations reform.

I would like to start by acknowledging the fine work done for so many years by our United Nations agencies in the field, particularly by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and by United Nations volunteers all over the world. Those agencies can truly be called our body's life blood, and at times literally so. Every day of every year, they attempt to bring hope, confidence and meaning to the lives of ordinary people. They provide people with the simplest and most basic definition of security. By that, I mean that they give people a feeling that even the most severe problems can be faced and solved. I thank them with great respect for their dedication and their professionalism. They represent the United Nations at its best.

Consequently, I believe that any reform of our Organization should be considered with one crucial primary question in mind: Does it directly strengthen the work of our agencies and people in the field? That is becoming more and more important to the ordinary people we represent.

The new century has brought a host of new challenges. The past year, like every year of this new century, has presented problems that are typical of those the United Nations is increasingly going to face and expected to solve. They are, sadly, all the stuff of regular breaking news: natural and environmental disasters, health, economic and security disasters, countless political failures and the enormous human suffering that follows.

The immediate impression is a dramatic one. Our new century seems to be defining itself in images of disaster — landslides, earthquakes, tsunamis and terrorist bombings. The most lasting images are human ones. Those are the countless victims of events over which they had no control and of which they had no knowledge or warning. The long-term result is a deep sense of insecurity. It is reaching into the lives of every individual, every family and every community in every country we represent.

Many people are feeling so insecure that they are engaged in finding any way they can to salvage some hope for themselves. In Asia, Africa and the Americas, they are doing so in their hundreds of thousands. They are leaving their families and homelands to emigrate. They often put their lives at enormous personal risk in the search for somewhere where they hope to find hope.

That presents a bleak vision of the future for millions of our people. It would be even bleaker without the United Nations. Sometimes, in the refugee camps, in the disaster areas and in all the other arenas

of destruction, the United Nations offers all they have by way of hope. Hence, the second consideration we give to proposals for reform is a human one. We ask a simple question: Is the proposal relevant to ordinary peoples' personal lives and problems?

Those lives are increasingly dominated by the extremely complex challenges of our new century. Those challenges are global. They are scientific, technological, economic, environmental and political. They now involve over six and a half billion people. Those people are becoming more and more dependent on each other for survival. That means, I believe, that we must continue to stress the need for more than just administrative reform. So our third consideration regarding reform is practical.

Does the proposed reform reflect the current century, its priorities, its special challenges and its changing character? In other words, are we certain that we are not trying to solve twenty-first-century problems with the mechanisms, priorities and procedures of the twentieth century and sometimes even of the nineteenth century?

We look forward to continuing our discussions with colleagues in the coming year on this critical matter of effective and lasting reform. We are starting to see what the twenty-first century is presenting, both the good and the disturbing. We are also seeing the demands it is making on the United Nations. They are considerable. We believe, however, that the considerations I have mentioned are the essential basis for reforming the United Nations in a manner that will ensure that our world body is well capable of meeting the twenty-first century on twenty-first century terms.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Norman José Caldera Cardenal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua.

Mr. Caldera Cardenal (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by congratulating the 192nd Member State, Montenegro, upon its accession to membership of the United Nations.

On 5 November, elections will be held in Nicaragua to elect its new Government. This session is therefore occurring at an appropriate moment for taking stock, before our own people and before the peoples of the United Nations, of the Nicaragua that could be achieved if the work carried out during the five-year term of the current President Enrique Bolaños Geyer is continued.

It has been our lot to fight tirelessly for a value which was recently consolidated in its universal dimension: the defence of democracy, which includes as essential components the rule of law, the balance of powers, the strengthening of State institutions and combating corruption.

Nicaragua has not travelled this difficult road alone. A new collective spirit has been present which has assisted its efforts, making it possible to overcome and punish corruption. Thanks to this same collective solidarity it was also possible to counter the partisan division of the State and the still-latent attempts to break with the cardinal rule of separation and independence of the public authorities. I must mention here that whenever anti-democratic forces sought to break with the constitutional order, they encountered the joint response of the people of Nicaragua, the private business sector, organized civil society and the international community.

Our first words of thanks go to all those Governments and organizations that, through their support, helped to protect in Nicaragua the principles of freedom and democracy that have today emerged as the new basic values of a renewed international society.

We thank our brother countries of the region and the Secretary-General of the Central American Integration System, the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS) and his Special Envoy in Nicaragua, the Member States of OAS, the Rio Group, the Andean Community of Nations, the Ibero-American Summit, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, Japan, the United States of America and the European Union.

But the time devoted to defending democracy has not prevented us from working to achieve the goals of development, law and order, security and stability.

Between 2002 and 2005, a period of barely four years, tax revenues increased more than three-fold, which clearly demonstrates the confidence of our citizens in their Government and also reflects the transparency of our public administration. This increase is continuing at the same pace in 2006. At their annual meeting concluded the day before yesterday, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank stated that tax earnings in Nicaragua

had been strong, with an increase in revenues that bore witness to the success of the fiscal policy and reforms implemented by the Government.

On the economic front, we have achieved radical change: there is an economic upturn, and we are regaining the confidence of the international community.

Through transparency and good governance, the completion point of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative was reached. A year ago, we were selected to receive the support of the Group of Eight, as well as forgiveness of the multilateral debt owed to the IMF, the World Bank and, very shortly, the Inter-American Development Bank, amounting to a reduction of approximately $800 million in our foreign debt. These two initiatives mean that over 85 per cent of our foreign debt has been forgiven. Nicaragua can now concentrate on reducing its domestic debt, which resulted from the fraudulent collapse of banks that occurred five and a half years ago.

It was President Bolaños Geyer who, in December 2001, spoke of the need for a trade agreement, what turned into the Central American Free Trade Agreement, between the countries of Central America, the Dominican Republic and the United States. This Agreement came into force in March 2006, opening up a new era of opportunity for our region. As a result of this treaty, the volume of exports from Nicaragua to the United States has increased by 20 per cent during the eight months it has been in existence.

We have achieved three consecutive years of economic growth on the basis of private investment. Since President Bolaños took office, direct foreign investment has led to the opening of a new company every month in the tax-free zones, and total exports have increased by 100 per cent in less than five years.

We have succeeded in turning tourism into a new engine of the economy on account of the revenues it generates, and for the first time it has become the greatest source of foreign currency earnings in our trade balance. Nicaragua is ranked third among the 10 must-visit destinations, according to the prestigious *Lonely Planet* travel guide. Similarly, Nicaragua has been classified by the World Tourism Organization as one of the best emerging markets at the world level and the best kept secret for retirees and for real estate development. We are considered to be the country that has made the greatest progress on the economic freedom front. For its part, the World Bank report, "Doing Business", places Nicaragua in 67th place worldwide and states that it has the best business climate in Central America and one of the best in the hemisphere. We are one of the safest countries in the hemisphere. Our murder rate is less than half the world average.

I am proud to say that we are now experiencing a new political, economic and social reality. Keeping his campaign promise, President Bolaños has virtually doubled the salary of primary and secondary school teachers and has doubled in absolute terms the budget allocated to post-secondary education.

In the area of health, the infant mortality rate fell from 35 per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 31 in 2006. The mortality rate for children under the age of 5 fell from 45 in 2001 to 40 in 2006, and the maternal mortality rate fell from 96.6 per 100,000 in 2003 to 83 in 2006. Immunization coverage increased between 2004 and 2006 by over 10 per cent.

We are developing a State policy for our emigrants, with a view to guaranteeing that they have full enjoyment of their political, social and civil rights, providing them with legal advice and with the protection to which the Constitution entitles them. We are doing all we can to defend their rights in any country where they may be found. That is the least we can do to repay the sacrifice they make in sending back remittances to improve the economic situation of their families. These remittances are equivalent to almost 50 per cent of our goods exports.

The Assembly will recall that President Reagan, when addressing the Soviet Premier on the subject of the Berlin Wall, said: "Tear down that wall". The President of the Dominican Republic, Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, once observed that in a globalized world where there is free movement of capital, goods and services, it is the human beings who do not enjoy freedom of movement of labour.

Thanks to the special law on migratory incentives for Nicaraguans living abroad, nationals who have lived for at least five years outside the country can come home with their household effects, their car and their work tools.

The results we have achieved in protecting our nationals abroad are substantial and have been

recognized by the international community. At the beginning of this month, the United States Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs brought to the attention of the international community the efforts made by Nicaragua through its diplomatic establishment to protect, assist and repatriate Nicaraguans who are the victims of human trafficking. We have built the material, human and technological infrastructure that will gradually generate a new political culture strengthened by the values of democracy.

Nicaragua does not see its future as being separate from that of Central America. This is why we are endeavouring to form a customs union and to further the integration process in all directions and at all levels, because this is the best way for a region which deserves prosperity and development to move forward.

Very soon, we shall start talks on an association agreement between the European Union and Central America, which will include a free trade agreement. It is an initiative that embodies the vision of two regions which, from different continents, view the future with similar values and institutions and common aspirations.

The Nicaraguan proposal to limit arms at the regional level has made substantial progress in matters relating to the submission of inventories of weapons, armed forces and public security personnel and in the generation of confidence-building measures.

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, per capita expenditure by Nicaragua on defence is $5.2 per year. In the list of 132 countries studied, Nicaragua is third among the countries which spent least on defence.

Nicaragua was the first independent country in the history of the United Nations to benefit from the presence of electoral observers. This time, too, Nicaragua will comply with the sacred duty of holding free and transparent elections which reflect the sovereign will of the people. On 5 November, the Nicaraguan people will have to decide between the caudillismo of the past and a future devoted to development, between corruption and transparency. We are sure that the international community will help us through this process by extending to us unwavering support at this critical moment of reaffirmation of democracy by a nation which has defended its right to freedom with its life.

The fate of our individual States is closely linked with that of our international system. The current world situation is testing the response capacity of our international system as a whole.

The problems faced by mankind are increasingly complex and tragic and call for our involvement to ensure that they are promptly and effectively dealt with. The recent crisis in the Middle East, the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the tensions in Iran, the problems arising in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the social and political conflicts being experienced in Haiti, the situation in Darfur and the threats of international terrorism demonstrate that neither the appeals of Secretary-General Kofi Annan nor the proposals to reform the United Nations system can be put off.

The United Nations must be reformed to provide a ready, efficient and effective response to the immense threats to world peace that also extend to the environment and health. Nicaragua maintains the position that these reforms should be comprehensive in nature since that is the only way of overcoming bureaucratic problems that stand in the way of prompt implementation of the resolutions of the General Assembly.

The reform process should cover the Secretariat, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, as well as the Security Council. The membership of the Security Council should better reflect current geopolitical realities, allowing for a more equitable and democratic representation of developing countries in both permanent and non-permanent categories. This expansion should serve to enhance multilateralism, strengthening the capacity to respond to world threats and challenges with a Council that has more authority, representativity and effectiveness.

In 2003, the Government of Nicaragua arranged the nomination and recognition of the Río San Juan — Nicaragua Biosphere Reserve in the Programme on Man and the Biosphere of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) — recognition which was approved on 15 September of that year, when it became part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. This reserve was added to the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, which, at 2 million hectares, covers 14 per cent of our national territory and is the largest continuous forested area in

Central America. In early 2006, President Bolaños established a preserve for 10 years, banning the export of six forest species in danger of extinction.

Nicaragua also restates from this podium its support for the cause of the Republic of China in Taiwan, which should achieve the legitimate representation of its 23 million inhabitants. It also calls for renewed and proactive efforts by the United Nations to maintain peace in East Asia.

We launch a humanitarian appeal for the freeing of the kidnapped persons in the Far and Middle East, and worldwide. The States Members of the United Nations have a duty, both individually and collectively, to protect the world population against any action that seeks to harm the life or dignity of any human being, from the time of conception to the time of death, or to undermine his or her aspiration to live in a democratic environment and to take advantage of opportunities for development. We should devote our best efforts to giving effect to this mandate.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Benaissa, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco.

Mr. Benaissa (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, I would like at the outset to extend my sincere congratulations to you and the brother country of the Kingdom of Bahrain on your election as the first Arab woman in the history of the United Nations to preside over the General Assembly. I wish you every success in your tasks during this session and in realizing our aspirations, and achieving practical and valuable results regarding items on the agenda.

I would like to avail myself of this occasion to express my warm thanks to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his brilliant presidency of last year's session.

Allow me also to seize this opportunity to reiterate Morocco's appreciation of Mr. Kofi Annan for the noble tasks he has been undertaking and for his tireless efforts throughout his term to consolidate our Organization's international position and to revitalize its role in the maintenance of international peace and security. We equally appreciate his unfailing support for regional and international development activities to ensure the promotion of the United Nations mechanisms and structures and thus reinforce their effectiveness.

The Kingdom of Morocco welcomes the accession of the Republic of Montenegro to membership of the United Nations and we assure it of our constructive and continuous cooperation.

This year's session coincides with the 50th anniversary of Morocco's joining the United Nations. They have been 50 years of clear and concrete commitment to the purposes and principles of our Organization aimed at fostering peace and security worldwide and at consolidating development for the benefit of all peoples and States, mainly in developing countries.

Joining the United Nations was one of the first sovereign decisions Morocco made in the wake of gaining its independence. It expressed the Kingdom's firm belief in the efficacy of multilateral action as one of the most viable means of managing chronic crises and as an appropriate tool to face growing international challenges. It also reflects Morocco's unfailing commitment to the values of active solidarity and fruitful cooperation, as expressed in a speech given by the late King Mohammed V on 6 November 1956, when he stated that

> "Morocco's attachment to the principles underpinning the United Nations reflects its commitment to supporting freedom and peace throughout the world and to establishing international relations on the basis of arbitration and concord, with no recourse whatsoever to violence or force, and relying on cooperation and solidarity rather than on animosity and discrimination".

Since joining the United Nations, the Kingdom of Morocco has endeavoured to contribute significantly to helping our Organization attain its status as a central actor in the establishment of international peace and security, as well as in organizing and promoting international relations to create a world order built on cooperation, justice and international legality. The Kingdom has always been an advocate of the principles of international law, United Nations resolutions and multilateral actions emanating from constructive dialogue and ongoing consultations as the most viable way to settle international conflicts and crises peacefully.

Throughout that period, the Kingdom has contributed to numerous United Nations peacekeeping operations in demonstration of its commitment to international peace and of its deeply rooted belief in the importance of collective security and of the role of the United Nations in that field. Today, our country is contributing to five peacekeeping operations in Africa, the Caribbean and Europe. That has earned Morocco the thirteenth position among countries contributing to peacekeeping operations internationally, the second at the Arab level and the sixth at the African level.

In addition, the Kingdom of Morocco has launched a process aimed at establishing active solidarity among members of the international community through constructive and fruitful partnerships between North and South, on the one hand, and the reinforcement of South-South cooperation as a strategic priority, on the other, in order to achieve sustainable and balanced development for the benefit of all.

The Kingdom of Morocco has further endeavoured to implement the recommendations adopted at important United Nations meetings and conferences on development issues, including the Millennium Development Goals, which are in full harmony with our national development strategy. In that regard, the National Initiative for Human Development, launched by His Majesty King Mohammed VI on 18 May 2005, testifies to Morocco's willingness to lay the foundations for a development model that embodies Morocco's political choices and is helping to establish a modern and democratic society. Modernization, democratization and economic development, as well as sustained human development indicators, are interdependent in the quest for equitable opportunities, the dissemination of knowledge and the provision of basic social services.

Our development initiative places a special emphasis on the empowerment of the Moroccan citizen as the focus of comprehensive development, in line with the Secretary-General's report of 2005, entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all".

In that context, and in a spirit guided by universal principles aimed at creating the necessary harmony between Morocco's international commitments and its national priorities, a workshop on the promotion of human rights was convened in Morocco. The workshop was marked by the issuance of specific recommendations upon the end of the mandate of our equity and reconciliation commission, in a critical and transparent evaluation of a specific period of Morocco's past with a sense of responsibility and a constructive vision of its future.

Since its inception, the United Nations has contributed to the settlement of many international disputes and the establishment of peace and security in many regions. However, the Middle East and Africa still suffer from many conflicts, wars and economic and social crises that thwart peoples' natural aspirations to security, stability and development.

In that regard, and having welcomed the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza as a first step towards the establishment of a Palestinian State in accordance with the road map, Morocco hopes that the current dire situation, which has led to even more killing and destruction, will rapidly come to an end. Following the failure of various international and regional efforts to resume the peace process and settle the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Kingdom of Morocco reiterates its call on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to assume their responsibilities in the search for a comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict, in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process, relevant United Nations resolutions and international legality, as well as the principle of land for peace.

Concerning the military aggression against brotherly Lebanon and the resultant loss of civilian life and destruction of infrastructure and service facilities, Morocco welcomed Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and expresses its hope that all concerned parties will cooperate in providing the appropriate political conditions for a lasting settlement on the basis of the Taif agreement and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Morocco also calls upon the international community to provide more cooperation and solidarity in the reconstruction of Lebanon and to support the success of efforts to achieve peace and tranquillity for our brother Lebanese.

As for the situation in the brotherly country of Iraq, Morocco acknowledges the outcome of the political process, in which all Iraqi parties and influential political actors took part. However, Morocco is still hoping for an end to the ongoing violence, which continues to bring suffering to

innocent Iraqi civilians. We hope that our Iraqi brothers can agree, as soon as possible, on the time and venue for a conference on Iraqi national accord, which could help establish a basis for the completion of institutional reforms thereby ensuring the sovereignty, territorial integrity, security and stability of a unified and safe Iraq.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose head of State, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, chairs the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, reaffirms its commitment to work together with all parties towards a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The achievement of that objective will depend on the Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories and the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.

Morocco firmly believes in dialogue and negotiations as a means of settling regional and international disputes. It also considers that resorting to force, whatever the reason or motives, will not yield viable solutions or lead to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. On the contrary, it will only exacerbate and prolong the status quo.

Morocco is equally convinced that peace in the region can be achieved only if the United Nations creates the right environment and works to eradicate the causes of tension and escalation and coordinates regional and international efforts aimed at reviving the peace process on all tracks, with a view to ultimately achieving security and lasting peace. In that way, the peoples of the region would be able to move towards a more promising future in which generations to come can cooperate and live together in harmony.

The African continent is facing a number of serious threats and major challenges. It is currently beset by many crises and conflicts that have proved difficult to resolve. Indeed, half of the armed conflicts in the world over the past decade have taken place in Africa, which also hosts half of the world's refugees. The continent is also confronted by numerous economic and social problems, including poverty, hunger, desertification and infectious diseases, which threaten the daily lives of millions of people.

This critical situation, which should by no means be considered inevitable, making Africa a priority for the United Nations and for international development programmes and agendas. However, programmes and initiatives must be better harmonized and coordinated if they are to create conditions conducive to sustainable development in Africa. To that end, we must consider creating an international mechanism that includes experts in the fields of security and development to supervise the implementation of the range of international programmes and initiatives concerning Africa.

For its part, the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to support all development efforts in Africa. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, a champion of peace and development whose enlightened and far-sighted vision is based on a full and deep understanding of the concerns of the continent, has introduced many initiatives and visited many African countries with the aim of strengthening the bonds of brotherhood, cooperation and solidarity among African peoples.

In this regard, Morocco calls for the holding next year of a high-level dialogue on Africa and development with a view to further intensifying the development debate and consultation and establishing mechanisms to guarantee the implementation of all international initiatives aimed at making full use of the continent's huge economic and human potential in the service of its development.

In his first address to the General Assembly, His Majesty the late King Mohammed V declared that the Kingdom of Morocco had chosen negotiation as the basis for its international relations, with a view to reaching mutual agreements, freely arrived at, and providing for peace, unity and solidarity among nations. In keeping with that broad vision, the Kingdom of Morocco has renewed its commitment to cooperate with the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy in order to find a lasting, negotiated and mutually acceptable political solution to the dispute over the Moroccan Sahara.

In this respect, and in response to the call of the Security Council to break the current deadlock and make progress towards a political, consensus-based and final solution to the dispute, Morocco will present an autonomy plan that would enable the inhabitants of the region to manage their local affairs within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Morocco.

To that end, nationwide consultations were launched in November 2005 with all political actors and local representatives of the region, within the framework of the Royal Consultative Council for Saharan Affairs, whose membership has been renewed, structure modernized and mandate strengthened. This process has been carried out on the basis of participation and transparency aimed at encouraging the adherence of all parties to the notion of autonomy. This experience is unique in the Arab North African region.

More than ever, the world needs a more efficient United Nations that can translate into reality the aspirations and expectations of all the peoples of the world, uphold the principles of international legality and foster the spirit of multilateralism through innovative mechanisms, value-added components and new ideas that can yield positive results.

As it has done over the past 50 years, the Kingdom of Morocco will contribute to strengthening the principles of the Organization and enhancing its work in the service of peace, development and accord among all peoples of the world.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Mrs. Rosemary Museminali, Minister of State for Cooperation of Rwanda.

Mrs. Museminali (Rwanda): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, at this sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

Each year the General Assembly provides an excellent opportunity for us to review our collective commitments as reflected in the Charter, as well as more recent ones such as those set out in the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome. We therefore view the beginning of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly as an opportunity to breathe new energy into our collective responsibilities articulated at previous conferences and summits. It is my earnest hope that we shall seize this opportunity to take stock of our successes and shortcomings and devise practical solutions to realize these commitments, particularly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In its preamble, the United Nations Charter expresses our collective determination to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. This statement formed a basis for the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and our renewal of those commitments at last year's World Summit. All of the outcomes of previous conferences and summits reflect the recognition of our collective interests and responsibilities in addressing the common problems affecting humankind.

Today, there is no greater danger threatening humanity than extreme poverty. Forty per cent of the world's population, or 2.5 billion people, live in absolute poverty on less than $2 a day, while more than 800 million people suffer from hunger and malnutrition. For sub-Saharan Africa, the statistics are even more staggering; in most cases, 60 to 70 per cent of national populations live on less than a dollar a day, while life expectancy at birth is less than 50 years.

This is clearly unacceptable at a time when the rest of the world enjoys unprecedented levels of affluence and technological and scientific advancement. As for the poor, their daily lives are a trial that nobody would wish to experience. We must not permit another five years to pass only to find out that no progress has been made and only to simply renew the same commitments. We must, therefore, devise means to do things radically differently and in an accelerated manner.

There are a number of areas that require our urgent attention if we are to make progress in attaining the MDGs by 2015 and in eventually eradicating poverty. I will highlight a few of these areas, which, in our view, are the most salient. Regardless of one's definition of good or effective governance, what has been proved is its importance in the sustained socio-economic development of a nation. We believe that the key features of good or effective governance include a political culture that fosters inclusive and competitive participation; robust national institutions that pursue effective and coherent national development strategies; effective management and oversight institutions; and, of course, the consolidation of the rule of law. It is our view that, by embracing good-governance principles, we are setting the stage for the attainment of our global and national targets.

Rwanda is strongly committed to these principles and has submitted itself to the scrutiny of our African peers under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The APRM is an African

initiative aimed at promoting good governance through constructive self-assessment and peer review. We welcome the acknowledgements of the progress we have made in many areas and commit ourselves to continuing to make improvements in the areas identified in the peer review report.

In the spirit of mutual accountability, it is our belief that the principles of good governance that prevail at the national level should also guide our relations with our development partners. Both sides of the ongoing governance debate should be given adequate and equal attention, particularly since aid effectiveness is also critical to the attainment of the MDGs.

We believe that improving the quality and increasing the quantity of official development assistance (ODA) is another important set of measures that would improve development prospects. The quality of ODA should be improved by adopting needs-based approaches, providing more budget support, supporting national poverty reduction programmes, reducing waste and overhead, and channelling aid to sectors that enhance productive capacities rather than perpetuate dependence.

It is critical that there be harmonization of the objectives of trade and development policies on the part of our development partners. Trade policies should complement, rather than undermine, the attainment of the development goals. We must recommit ourselves, both in principle and practice, to an open, rules-based, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system. Any progress that developing countries like Rwanda might achieve in attaining the MDGs will not be sustainable unless measures are taken to provide greater opportunity for those countries to access the markets of the developed world, thereby increasing household and national incomes.

The attainment of the MDGs will require additional resources. We thus consider it essential to increase the quantity of aid. We welcome the decision by some developed States to dramatically increase the volume of ODA over the next few years, and we are grateful to them. We also congratulate those States that have reached or exceeded the internationally agreed 0.7 per cent of gross national income for the ODA target, and we welcome the decision by those States that have set timetables to achieve or exceed that target by 2015. The challenge is, therefore, to translate these commitments into tangible disbursements and the implementation of real poverty reduction programmes on the ground.

The most serious challenge to our development and the attainment of the MDGs is the unprecedented price level of fossil-fuel energy on the one hand, and the reduction in hydroelectric generation capacity on the other.

There is a danger that the successes registered so far towards the attainment of the MDGs could easily be reversed if the current energy sector cost trends continue unabated. It is critical, therefore, that we invest heavily in sustainable alternative energy sources for the long term. In the short- and medium-term, however, we shall need to find ways to mitigate the effects of energy price shocks if we are to sustain and accelerate the attainment of the MDGs.

The scourge of war continues to cause the massive loss of human life and blight entire communities. The ongoing conflicts in some parts of Africa and the Middle East pose a serious threat to international peace and security and require our collective efforts to reach political settlements to these conflicts.

Our painful experience in Rwanda has taught us that peace comes at a price. There can be no peace without reconciliation and recognition of the rights and interests of all people, including the rights of States to exist and the right of self-determination. We have learned that no community's rights can or should supersede another's. We have learned the value of sharing and the value of communities' living side by side in peace and mutual respect.

Rwanda is happy to contribute to the promotion of international peace and security through its military and police contributions to the United Nations and African Union peacekeeping missions in the Sudan, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and the Comoros. We are committed to continuing these contributions for as long as they are required and as long as our resources permit. The Security Council and the Secretariat should continue to work towards better-conceived and more-effective peacekeeping operations, towards greater participation by regional organizations in conflict resolution and towards the institutionalization of lessons learned from the past. There is also an urgent need to institutionalize relations between the United Nations and regional organizations, particularly the

African Union, in the areas of conflict resolution and peacekeeping.

We warmly welcome the reforms adopted during the previous session of the General Assembly. We take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the sixtieth session, and all Member States on the reforms, including the setting up of the Peacebuilding Commission, the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the renewed commitments to combat HIV/AIDS adopted at the special session of the General Assembly in June. There has also been commendable progress on management reform, including the establishment of an ethics office, strengthening whistle-blower protection and reforming procurement procedures to prevent corruption. We look forward to working together with other delegations during this session to improve coherence, efficiency and effectiveness within the Secretariat and to continue to review the Organization's mandates, so that the United Nations may be strengthened to respond better to the expectations of Member States.

It is our hope that this session of the General Assembly might achieve greater progress with respect to Security Council reform. Rwanda supports the common African position on this issue and believes that reform of the working methods to promote transparency and accountability is most urgent. The reform process should enable States that are not members of the Council to participate more actively in its deliberative and decision-making processes, especially on issues that affect them. A reformed Council should be seen by all States, especially the smaller States, to be more accessible, transparent, credible and legitimate.

In the next few months, the General Assembly will elect a new Secretary-General upon recommendation of the Security Council. Rwanda supports the common African position that the next Secretary-General should be from Asia. As far as the election process is concerned, we appeal for greater transparency in that process in accordance with the Charter and the basic principles of democracy.

In conclusion, in today's globalized world, our interdependence has never been more self-evident. As a result, the imperative for our collective action is greater than ever. Once again, the onus is on all of us to translate our many challenges and opportunities into a shared destiny of peace, security and prosperity for all.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fawzi Bin Abdul Majeed Shobokshi, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It honours me to deliver the statement of Saudi Arabia on behalf of Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. At the outset, it gives me great pleasure to express to you and your Government my most sincere congratulations on your election as President of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. I am fully confident that your diplomatic expertise and thorough knowledge of international affairs will guarantee the success of this session. I would like to express my appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, Foreign Minister of Sweden, who presided over the previous session with wisdom and expertise. The constant and diligent efforts of the Secretary-General were essential for revitalizing the role of the United Nations and for upholding its principles, despite the difficult times and crucial challenges we face. He, therefore, deserves our full support and deepest gratitude.

The world today faces a host of global problems that can be successfully addressed only within the context of multilateral cooperation under the umbrella of the United Nations. Human suffering caused by poverty, hunger, malnutrition, the spread of diseases and epidemics and natural disasters still require the concerted efforts of the international community in combating them. These global challenges do not distinguish among people on the basis of colour, religion or nationality. Invariably, it is the most vulnerable who suffer the most from these humanitarian threats, making it all the more urgent for the international community to assume its collective responsibility in addressing these issues.

The Middle East is in the midst of a very dangerous phase, with the emergence of new crises and the worsening of old ones, such as the continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon; the volatile situation on the Lebanese-Israeli border; the invasion of Lebanon; the challenges posed by continued instability and sectarian violence in Iraq; and the as-yet unresolved issue of Iran's nuclear programme. The accumulation of crises and tensions in

the region can only encourage an environment in which extremism and terrorism will thrive with undesirable consequences. It is, therefore, imperative that we warn specifically against the continued trend towards stopgap crisis management that has taken the place of the serious pursuit of a comprehensive and just solution based on the principles of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy free from partiality, double standards or selectivity.

Undoubtedly, the key to resolving these multiple crises will be to invigorate the peace process with the aim of achieving a just and durable settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the oldest conflict in modern times. This conflict is the most enduring international conflict today, and its continuation negatively affects the prospects of reaching effective solutions to other crises.

The ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine represents a flagrant breach of international law and the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and blatant disregard for resolutions of international legitimacy. This issue lies at the core of the Middle Eastern problem. The international community should no longer tolerate procrastination or repeated failures in resolving this situation. The international community, and especially the major Powers, must set aside their divisions and face up to the vital task of reaching, as soon as possible, a peaceful, just and lasting solution, in accordance with the principles of international legitimacy.

The resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict must be placed in its appropriate context by reconciling the rights of the Palestinian and the Israeli people and establishing two neighbouring States enjoying security, which is a natural outcome of peace. It is peace that ensures security, and not the other way around. The basis for a solution is clear to all of us, as expressed by the President of the United States in the context of his two-State vision, which is in harmony with relevant United Nations resolutions and with the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted unanimously at the Beirut Summit. What is urgently needed today is to link that vision with a clear agenda bound to a specific time-frame.

Regrettably, the problem has been portrayed as inextricably complicated and not amenable to customary solutions. Using security considerations as a pretext, exceptional provisions allowed one of the parties to the conflict to specify unilaterally the basis and conditions for negotiations, to choose its negotiating partner, to violate previously concluded agreements, to impose unilateral measures and to use force to impose a status quo. Our purpose here is not to enter into futile debates, but it is important to recognize that the peace process has suffered greatly from these exceptions, which give rise to double standards and inequitable obligations.

Reviving the peace process will require serious international cooperation so as to realize the two-State vision within a reasonable time-frame. Recent events have once again proved that military solutions only undermine the interests and the security of all parties. It is therefore essential that we learn the lessons of our previous failures in the pursuit of peace. These failures resulted from an exaggerated emphasis on procedural and provisional issues. The establishment of interim security arrangements proved complicated and exhausting, while procedures for building mutual trust enabled the enemies of peace to undermine the peace process in its entirety.

What is required from us today is a fundamental change in our quest to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the area. It is imperative that we go to the root and heart of the conflict by establishing an effective mechanism to ensure immediate and peaceful negotiations addressing all final status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, refugees and mutual security arrangements. The required breakthrough can be achieved only through a historic and comprehensive deal.

A clear outline of the solution has been apparent ever since the adoption of resolution 181 (II) in 1947. That resolution set out the partition of Palestine, which was then under a British Mandate, into an Arab and an Israeli State. It also proposed clearly defined borders for those two States. Since then, the Security Council and the General Assembly have issued hundreds of resolutions, including Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which emphasized the principle of refraining from the acquisition of territory by force, and called on Israel to withdraw from all territories occupied in 1967. It also reiterated the need to find a just solution to the issue of the Palestinian refugees. Thirty-nine years after the adoption of this resolution, the Palestinian people continue to be deprived of their inherent right to self-determination and of their entitlement to live in an independent State with Arab Jerusalem as its capital.

Only two months ago Israel launched a brutal act of aggression against Lebanon, resulting in the destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure, the displacement of one third of its population, and the wounding and killing of thousands of civilians, including women, children and the elderly. That senseless war, of course, did not make Israel any safer. The only thing achieved by Israel in Lebanon was vast destruction and devastation, provoking yet deeper hatred and enmity. We wonder how many tragedies and victims we and the world will have to have before everyone understands that military solutions will not succeed.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms its full support for the legitimate Lebanese Government as it seeks to extend its authority and influence over its entire territory. The Kingdom also calls on the brotherly people of Lebanon to stand united so that their country may once again enjoy security and prosperity. We reiterate the need for all parties to remain committed to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and call for a rapid Israeli withdrawal from the Sheba'a Farms area, recognized by Israel as an occupied territory. We also call for a return to the Armistice Agreement signed between Lebanon and Israel in 1949, as this is the only means of guaranteeing security and stability and avoiding a return to the status quo ante.

As part of our commitment to reconstruction efforts in Lebanon, we call on the international community to hold Israel responsible for providing fair compensation for the destruction and losses inflicted upon Lebanon as a result of that aggression. One of the reasons why Lebanon has been a victim of repeated Israeli invasions — seven so far — is that we have not held the aggressor accountable.

We are profoundly concerned and extremely saddened by the deteriorating security situation in Iraq, marked by daily confrontation, acts of violence and bombings. The absence of security and stability in Iraq continues to hamper the efforts of all countries committed to assisting Iraq in overcoming its ordeal, rehabilitating its economy and helping it to rebuild. The Kingdom has always reaffirmed the importance of consolidating Iraq's unity, respecting its independence and sovereignty, and refraining from interfering in its internal affairs. We call on the international community to support the programme adopted by the legitimate Iraqi Government, led by Mr. Nuri Al-Maliki, to achieve a comprehensive national reconciliation; revitalize Government institutions in the security, military, political and economic areas; and disarm the militias.

It has long been acknowledged that the proliferation of nuclear weapons has seriously undermined the security of all countries. Over time, a number of international treaties and conventions have produced bilateral and multilateral obligations, but such obligations are of no use if they are not fully observed and fully applied. We cannot ignore the serious threat to global peace and security that such weapons continue to pose, regardless of whether they are used in wars between States or fall into the hands of terrorist groups.

Effectively preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will require abandoning double standards and emphasizing the importance of making the entire Middle East, including the Arab Gulf region, a zone free from nuclear weapons. Israel is the only country in the region that is known to possess weapons of mass destruction but is not subjected to any form of monitoring.

While we support the right of all countries to the peaceful use of nuclear energy — including the acquisition of know-how and nuclear technology for peaceful purposes — we call on all parties to support the path of negotiations and peaceful solutions with regard to the Iranian nuclear issue. Iran's repeated statements that its nuclear programme is restricted to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy should continue to serve as a strong basis for negotiations.

The Kingdom and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council are eager to maintain and enhance their relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and we hope that the Government of Iran will respond positively to the repeated calls by the United Arab Emirates for the peaceful resolution of the issue of the occupied islands belonging to the Emirates.

International terrorism is a threat to us all. The ongoing atrocities perpetrated by terrorists continue to test our resolve to combat and counter terrorism. There is no acceptable justification for any form of terrorism, but we cannot ignore the fact that it has roots and causes that enable it to thrive. Achieving a decisive victory over terrorism will require not only that we deny all financial support to terrorists, but also that we address the origins of extremist thought and the

conditions in which terrorists prosper. If we address the feelings of despair, anger and frustration experienced by peoples when they are denied their legitimate rights, we will deprive extremists of their causes and rallying cries.

As one of the main targets of terrorism, the Kingdom has repeatedly denounced terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and has achieved tangible success in combating it. The Kingdom has acceded to most of the international counter-terrorism agreements, as well as the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism and the Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on Combating International Terrorism. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdelaziz Al Saud, has proposed the establishment of an international counter-terrorism centre under United Nations auspices. The only way to thwart the evil plans of terrorists is through the exchange of intelligence and updated information among countries and agencies. Innovative solutions can be found to adequately address reservations regarding the sensitivity of such information and its secret sources.

As we renew our commitment to and participation in the international campaign against terrorism, we must at the same time draw attention to growing worldwide concerns about its flagrant use as a pretext by extremist forces and by advocates of a clash between civilizations and cultures.

We must periodically evaluate the effectiveness and success of our methods of combating terrorism and extremism. Here, I must reiterate that no true religion advocates the use of terrorism; all of the world's great religions promote noble values. We should not hold the vast majority of true believers responsible for the deviant behaviour of a very small minority of adherents of any religion. Saudi Arabia strongly rejects the characterization of Islam as a violent religion that in any way supports terrorism. Saudi Arabia calls on all those who want to learn more about Islam and its attitude towards terrorism to consult reliable authorities or documents such as the 10-year plan of action adopted unanimously by the members of the OIC at its recent extraordinary summit held in Saudi Arabia. The success of the global counter-terrorism campaign will depend on our strict adherence to the rules of international law, human rights, norms and humanitarian values, and respect for all religions.

The continued humanitarian suffering in Darfur is unacceptable to all of us. We hope that the current efforts to remedy the situation will be given a chance to succeed. We hope that this destructive conflict, which is causing unjustifiable losses on all sides, will swiftly come to an end. The Sudanese authorities, who have achieved a historic success by bringing about reconciliation in the South, are cooperating with efforts to achieve reconciliation in Darfur, and have welcomed the deployment of African Union forces. Arab States have committed themselves to providing those forces with the support and financial resources that they need. We are concerned that the deployment of international troops without the consent of the sovereign Government of the Sudan will make them part of the problem, rather than part of the solution.

Saudi Arabia, itself a developing country, plays a major role in promoting development in other developing and least developed countries. To help those countries overcome their problems of poverty and underdevelopment, Saudi Arabia provides generous aid through its national institutions, as well as through international and regional institutions. Over the past three decades, Saudi Arabia has contributed approximately 4 per cent of its gross domestic product in official development assistance (ODA) — the highest percentage contributed by any country in the world. Saudi Arabia has also offered debt relief amounting to more than $6 billion to a number of least developed countries.

In order to ensure continued global economic growth, Saudi Arabia has increased its petroleum production capacity to stabilize petroleum markets, to ensure the continued flow of sufficient petroleum and to curb artificially high prices. Saudi Arabia hosts the secretariat of the International Energy Forum, which it established as a forum for discussing areas for cooperation and dialogue between petroleum-consuming and petroleum-producing countries. Increased cooperation between those countries will contribute directly to the stabilization of petroleum markets. Petroleum, of course, is an essential strategic commodity for the promotion of sustained global economic growth.

Our world is experiencing ever-accelerating and increasingly complex political, economic and social changes. Now more than ever, it is vital that we cooperate with one another to address the complex issues and changes facing us. Balanced and respectful

relations among countries, based on the principles of justice, mutual trust and true partnership, are essential to that end. Promoting healthy relations and understanding among nations will best equip us to meet future challenges and to respond to them in a way that will benefit all of humanity.

The President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Mavroyiannis (Cyprus): I apologize, Madam President, for taking the floor at this late hour. I know that I am taking advantage of your incredible stamina, but I hope that you will bear with me for a few minutes.

It is my duty to reply to the statement made earlier by His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Gül, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

I would like to express regret and disappointment with regard to four aspects of his statement. The first is Mr. Gül's reference to the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, reference to which is a testament to Turkey's lack of commitment to the reunification of Cyprus, but only to the secessionist aspirations of the breakaway regime it has installed in the area of Cyprus that it continues to occupy.

The second is Mr. Gül's reference to a "new partnership based on political equality", which proves that Turkey has abandoned agreements, committed to even by the Turkish Cypriot leadership, which describe the form of a settlement of the Cyprus problem in terms of a bizonal, bicommunal federation.

The third is Mr. Gül's assessment of the raison d'être of the process agreed on 8 July 2006 by the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus. Obviously, Mr. Gül's aim is to bypass the creation of common ground for negotiation and revive the Annan plan in the form in which it was rejected in a referendum. While the 8 July agreement clearly aims to prepare the ground for full-fledged negotiations between the two leaders, Turkey is clearly trying to depart from the object and purpose of this agreement, the focus of which is on preparation and substantive progress before reaching the stage of full-fledged negotiations.

Lastly, I wish to point out the unsubstantiated allegation made by Mr. Gül that Turkish Cypriots reside in isolation. The lack of sufficient economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community, if any, is owed only to the consequences of the Turkish invasion, which left the northern part of Cyprus under illegal occupation; to the policy of their leadership to project a separate legal entity; and to their refusal to make use of existing legal procedures and regulations.

Thus, references to "unfair restrictions" imposed upon Turkish Cypriots, as Turkey has chosen to label them, are profoundly misguided, as explained by the President of Cyprus, His Excellency Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, in his speech on 19 September 2006 before this Assembly (see A/61/PV.11).

Mr. Mollahosseini (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom made baseless allegations against my country.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a victim of terrorism, has a high motivation to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The United Kingdom would do better to discontinue its support for State terrorism in the Middle East that recently caused the deaths of hundreds of innocent people, and to stop the support of those terrorist groups that are actively operating against neighbouring countries from territories under its military occupation.

On the nuclear issue, we humbly suggest to the United Kingdom that it not equate itself with the international community. Just recently, 118 countries of the Non-Aligned Movement strongly supported Iran's nuclear programme. Furthermore, the United Kingdom knows very well who is isolated in the world — and even in its own country.

The meeting rose at 8.45 p.m.